

The GIRLS of CENTRAL HIGH *on* TRACK & FIELD



BY GERTRUDE W. MORRISON



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BOBBY WON BY A CLEAN TWO YARDS.

Girls of Central High on Track and Field

(Frontispiece) Page 207

The Girls of Central High on Track and Field

OR
The Champions of the School League

BY
GERTRUDE W. MORRISON

AUTHOR OF THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH,
THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH ON LAKE LUNA,
ETC.

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THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH

Or, Rivals for All Honors

**THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH ON LAKE
LUNA**

Or, The Crew That Won

**THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH AT BASKET-
BALL**

Or, The Great Gymnasium Mystery

**THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH ON THE
STAGE**

Or, The Play That Took the Prize

**THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH ON TRACK
AND FIELD**

Or, The Champions of the School League

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THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH ON TRACK AND FIELD

CHAPTER I

THE GIRL ON THE STONE FENCE

THE roads were muddy, but the uplands and the winding sheep-paths across them had dried out under the caressing rays of the Spring sun and, with the budding things of so many delicate shades of green, the groves and pastures—all nature, indeed—were garbed in loveliness.

The group of girls had toiled up the ascent to an overhanging rock on the summit of a long ridge. Below—in view from this spot for some rods—wound the brown ribbon of road which they had been following until the upland paths invited their feet to firmer tread.

There were seven of the girls and every one of the seven—in her way—was attractive. But the briskest, and most eager, and most energetic, was really the smaller—a black-eyed, be-curved, laughing miss who seemed bubbling over with high spirits.

"Sit down—do, Bobby! It makes me simply *ache* to see you flitting around like a robin. And I'm tired to death!" begged one girl, who had dropped in weariness on the huge, gray rock.

"How can you expect to dance half the night, Jess Morse, and then start off on a regular walking 'tower?'" demanded the girl addressed. "I didn't go to Mabel Boyd's party last night. As Gee Gee says, 'I conserved my energies.'"

"I don't believe anything ever tires you, Bobs," said the girl who sat next to Jess—a vigorous, good looking maid with a very direct gaze, who was attractively gowned in a brown walking dress. "You are next door to perpetual motion."

"How'd you know who I was next door to?" laughed Clara Hargrew, whom her friends insisted on calling "Bobby" because her father, Tom Hargrew, had nicknamed her that when she was little, desiring a boy in the family when only girls had been vouchsafed to him.

"And it is a fact that that French family who have moved into the little house next us are just as lively as fleas. They could be called 'perpetual motion,' all right.

"And oh, say!" cried the lively Bobby, "we had the greatest joke the other night on Lil Pendleton. You know, she thinks she's some

French scholar—and she *does* speak high school French pretty glibly——”

“How’s that, young lady?” interposed the girl in brown. “Put away your hammer. Do you *dare* knock anything taught in Central High?”

“That’s all right, Mother Wit,” drawled Bobby Hargrew. “But any brand of French that one learns out of a book is bound to sound queer in the ears of the Parisian born—believe me! And these Sourat people are the real thing.”

“But what about Lily Pendleton?” demanded one of the two girls who were dressed exactly alike and looked so much alike that one might have been the mirrored reflection of the other.

“Why,” replied Bobby, thus urged by one of the Lockwood twins, “Lil had some of us over to her house the other evening, and she is forever getting new people around her—like her mother, you know. Mrs. Pendleton has the very *queerest* folk to some of her afternoons—long-haired pianists, and long-haired Anarchists, and once she had a short-haired pugilist—only he was reformed, I believe, and called himself a physical instructor, or a piano-mover, or something——”

“Stop, stop!” cried Jess Morse, making a

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grab at Bobby. "You're running on like Tennyson's brook. You're a born gossip."

"You're another! Don't you want to hear about these Sourats?"

"I don't think any of us will hear the end of your story if you don't stick to the text a little better, Bobby," remarked a quiet, graceful girl, who stood upright, gazing off over the hillside and wooded valley below, to the misty outlines of the city so far away.

"Then keep 'em still, will you, Nell?" demanded Bobby, of the last speaker. "Listen: The Sourats were invited with the rest of us over to Lily's, and Lil sang us some songs in American French. Afterward I heard Hester Grimes ask the young man, Andrea Sourat, if the songs did not make him homesick, and with his very politest bow, he said:

"'No, Mademoiselle! Only seek.'

"I don't suppose the poor fellow knew how it sounded in English, but it certainly was an awful slap at Lil," giggled Bobby.

"Well, I wish they wouldn't give us languages at High," sighed Nellie Agnew, Dr. Arthur Agnew's daughter, when the laugh had subsided, and still looking off over the prospect. "I know my German is dreadful."

"Let's petition to do away with Latin and

Greek, too," suggested Bobby, who was always deficient in those studies. "'Dead languages'—what's the good of 'em if they are deceased, anyway? I've got a good mind to ask Old Dimple a question next time."

"What's the question, Bobby?" asked Jess, lazily.

"Why, if they're 'dead languages,' who killed 'em? He ought to have a monument, whoever he was—and if he'd only buried them good and deep he might have had *two* monuments."

"If you gave a little more time to studying books and less time to studying mischief——" began the girl in brown, when suddenly Nellie startled them all by exclaiming:

"Look there! See that girl down there? What do you suppose she is doing?"

Some of them jumped up to look over the edge of the rock on which they rested; but Jess Morse refused to be aroused.

"What's the girl doing?" she drawled. "It's got to be something awfully funny to get me on my feet again——"

"Hush!" commanded the girl in brown.

"Can she hear us, 'way down there, Laura Belding?" asked Nellie Agnew, anxiously. "See there! Something's chasing her—eh?"

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The girl who had attracted their attention was quite unknown to any of the walking party. And she was, at first sight, an odd-looking person. She wore no hat, and her black hair streamed behind her in a wild tangle as she ran along the muddy road. She had a vivid yellow handkerchief tied loosely about her throat, and her skirt was green—a combination of colors bound to attract attention at a distance.

When the girls first saw this fugitive—for such she seemed to be—she was running from the thick covert of pine and spruce which masked the road to the west, and now she leaped upon the stone fence which bordered the upper edge of the highway as far as the spectators above could trace its course.

The stone wall was old, and broken in places. It must have offered very insecure footing; but the oddly dressed girl ran along it with the confidence of a chipmunk.

“Did you ever see anything like that?” gasped Bobby. “I’d like to have her balance.”

“And her feet!” agreed Jess, struggling to her knees the better to see the running girl.

“She’s bound to fall!” gasped Nellie.

“Not she!” said Eve Sitz, the largest and quietest girl of the group. “Those Gypsies run like dogs and are just as sure-footed as—as chamois,” added the Swiss girl, harking back to

a childhood memory of her own mountainous country.

"A Gypsy!" asked Bobby, in a hushed voice. "You don't mean it?"

"She's dressed like one," said Eve.

"And see how brown she is," added Laura Belding, otherwise "Mother Wit."

"There! she almost fell," gasped one of the twins who stood now, with arms entwined, looking at the flying girl with nervous expectancy. It did not seem as though she could run the length of the stone fence without coming to grief.

But it was a quick journey. With a flying leap the girl in the green skirt and yellow scarf disappeared in a clump of brush which masked the wall at its easterly end, just where the road dipped toward the noisy brook which curved around that shoulder of the ridge and, later, fell over a ledge into a broad pool—the murmur of the cascade being faintly audible to the spectators on the summit of the ridge.

"She's gone!" spoke Bobby, finally, breaking the silence.

"But who's that coming after her?" demanded Nellie, looking back toward the West. "There! down in the shadow of the trees. Isn't that a figure moving, too?"

CHAPTER II

HIDE AND SEEK

"It's a man!"

Dora Lockwood said it so tragically that Bobby was highly amused.

"My goodness me!" she chortled. "You said that with all the horrified emphasis of a spinster lady."

"It is a man—isn't it?" whispered the other twin.

"I—I guess so," Laura Belding said, slowly.

"It is," declared Jess. "And he's a tough looking character."

"And he is acting quite as oddly as the girl did," remarked Bobby. "What do you suppose it means?"

"He's a Gypsy, too, I believe," put in Eve Sitz, suddenly.

"Say! this is getting melodramatic," laughed Laura Belding.

"Just like 'The Gypsy's Warning,' or something quite as hair-raising, eh?" agreed Bobby.

"There! he's coming out," gasped Jess.

The man appeared for half a minute in the clearer space of the open road. He was staring all about, up and down the road, along the edge of the woods, and even into the air. The seven girls were behind the fringe of bushes that edged the huge rock, and he could not see them.

"What an evil-faced fellow he is!" whispered Dora Lockwood.

"And see the big gold rings in his ears," added her twin, Dorothy.

"Do you suppose he is really after that girl?" observed Laura, thoughtfully.

"Whether he is, or not, it's none of our business, I suppose," returned Jess, who was Mother Wit's closest chum.

"I'm not so sure of that."

"My goodness! if they're Gypsies, we don't want to have anything to do with them," exclaimed Dorothy.

"Oh, the Romany people aren't so bad," said Eve Sitz, easily. "They have customs of their own, and live a different life from we folk——"

"Or 'us folk?' " suggested Nellie, smiling.

"From other folk, anyway!" returned the big girl, cheerfully. "They come through this section every Spring—and sometimes later in the

year, too. We have often had them at the house," she added, for Eve's father had a large farm, and from that farm the seven girls had started on this long walk early in the morning.

It was the Easter vacation at Central High and these friends were all members of the junior class. Centerport, the spires and tall buildings of which they could now see in the distance, was a wealthy and lively city of some hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, situated on the southern shore of Lake Luna, a body of water of considerable size.

At either end of the lake was another large town—namely Lumberport and Keyport. In each of these latter cities was a well conducted high school, and in Centerport there were three—the East and West Highs, and Central High, the newest and largest.

For a year now the girls of all these five high schools had been deeply interested in athletics, including the games usually played upon the Girls' Branch Athletic League grounds—canoeing, rowing, ski running, and lastly, but not least in value according to the estimation of their instructors, walking. Usually the physical instructor of Central High, Mrs. Case, accompanied her pupils on their walking tours; but this vacation the seven friends who now stood upon the summit

of this big, gray rock, had determined to indulge in a long walk by themselves, and they had come over to Eve Sitz's house the night before so as to get an early start on the mountain road to Fielding, twenty miles away. From that place they would take the train back to Centerport, and Eve was to remain all night with Laura at the Belding home.

These girls, although of strongly marked and contrasting characters, were intimate friends. They had been enthusiastic members of the girls' athletic association from its establishment; and they had, individually and together, taken an important part in the athletic activities of Central High.

For instance, in the first volume of this series, entitled, "The Girls of Central High; Or, Rivals for All Honors," Laura Belding was able to interest one of the wealthiest men of Centerport, Colonel Richard Swayne, in the girls' athletic association, then newly formed, so that he gave a large sum of money toward a proper athletic field and gymnasium building for their sole use.

In "The Girls of Central High on Lake Luna; Or, the Crew That Won," the second story of the series, the girls were mainly centering their attention upon aquatic sports; and the Lockwood twins—Dora and Dorothy—were particularly ac-

tive in this branch of athletics. They won honorable mention if not the prize in the canoe event, and were likewise members of the Central High girls' crew that won the cup in the contest of eight-oared shells.

The third volume of the series, named "The Girls of Central High at Basketball; Or, The Great Gymnasium Mystery," particularly related the fortunes of the representative basketball team of Central High, and of which each girl now gathered here on the ridge was a member.

Not long previous to this day in the Spring vacation when the seven were tramping toward Fielding, Jess Morse had made a great hit with her school friends and instructors, as well. She had written a play, which was performed by members of the girls' secret society of the school and some of their boy friends, and so good was it that it not only won a prize of two hundred dollars for which many of the girls of Central High had competed, but it attracted the attention of a professional theatrical producer, who had made a contract with Mrs. Morse, Jess's mother, for the use of the play in a revised form upon the professional stage. The details of all this are to be found in the fourth volume of the series, entitled, "The Girls of Central High on the Stage; Or, The Play That Took the Prize."

"There! the fellow's going back," said Jess

Morse, suddenly calling attention to the dark man on the road below.

"If he was after the girl he has given up the chase. I am glad of that," added her chum.

"But where did the girl go?" demanded Bobby Hargrew, craning her neck to peer toward the bushes on the easterly side of the rock.

"There she is!" ejaculated Dora Lockwood, grabbing Bobby by the arm.

She pointed down the side of the ridge, where the rough pasture land dropped to the verge of the brook. The other girls came running and gazed in the direction she pointed out.

The green skirt and the yellow scarf appeared. The girl was wading in the stream, and she passed swiftly along, seen by the spectators at every opening in the fringe of trees and brush that bordered the brook.

"In the water at this time of the year!" gasped Jess.

"And in her shoes and stockings! She wouldn't have had time to stop to take them off and get so far up stream," declared Bobby, almost dancing up and down in her eagerness.

"What do you suppose it means?" cried Nellie.

"She is running away from the man, I guess," admitted Laura, slowly.

"And trying to hide her trail," added Eve.

"Hide her trail! Is this the Indian country? Are the Gypsies savages?" demanded Nellie. "Has she got to run along the top of a stone fence and then take to a running stream to throw off pursuit?"

"That is her hope, I expect," Laura said.

"But *why?*" cried Bobby. "You can't tell me that even Gypsies are as keen on a trail as all that——"

"Hark!" commanded Laura. "Listen."

"It's dogs," spoke Bobby, in a moment.

"O—o—o—o! sounds like a wolf," shuddered Dora.

"It is worse," said Eve Sitz, her face flushing. "That is the bay of a bloodhound. I remember that we saw one of the great, lop-eared animals in leash when that party of Romanys went past our place last week."

"You don't mean that, Eve?" Jess cried. "A bloodhound?"

"And they have put him on the trail of that girl—sure as you live!" declared the farmer's daughter, with decision.

CHAPTER III

THE GYPSY CAMP

"WHY! I think this is outrageous," said Nellie Agnew. "We ought to find a constable and have such a thing stopped. Think of chasing that poor girl with a mad dog——"

"I guess he isn't mad," ventured Eve, soberly.

Bobby laughed. "Even if he's only vexed I wouldn't want a bloodhound tearing after me over these hills."

"You know what I mean," persisted Nellie, still wrathfully. "It is a desperate shame! The dog will hurt her——"

"No, no!" said Eve. "It is trained. And the man has it in leash——"

"Hush! here they are!" warned Laura, and the girls hid themselves behind the fringe of bushes.

The dog gave tongue just as it came in sight, and the sound sent a shiver over the watchers.

The baying of a bloodhound is a very terrifying sound indeed.

With the dogs were three men—one of them the same the girls of Central High had seen before. The other two were fully as rough-looking.

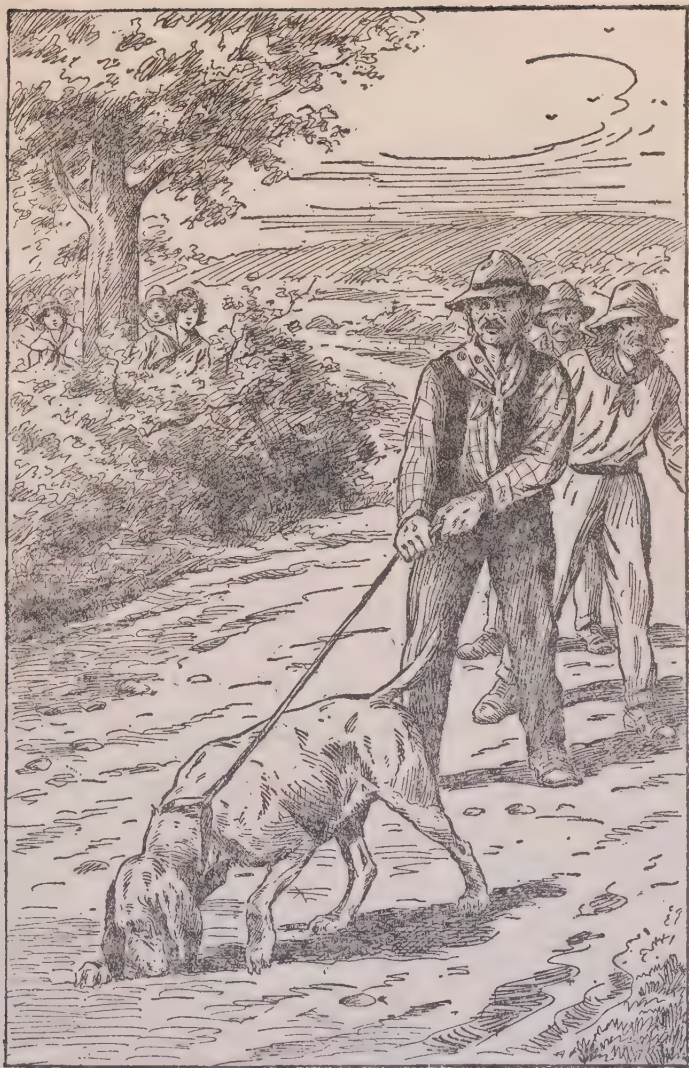
“I hope they don’t find her!” exclaimed Bobby.

“They’ll find you if you don’t keep still,” warned Jess.

But it appeared to the girls that the Gypsies were having considerable difficulty in following the trail of the girl who had fled along the top of the old stone wall. The dog searched from side to side of the road. He leaped the wall, dragging one of the men after him, and ran about the lower field. That she had traversed the stone fence, like a fox, never seemed to enter the men’s minds, nor the dog’s either.

For some time the party of hunters were in sight; but finally they went off in an easterly direction along the road, passing over the brook in which the strange girl had left her “water trail,” and the girls of Central High believed that the fugitive was safe—for the time being, at least.

“I wish we knew where she was going,” said Nellie. “I’d help her, for one.”



THE DOG SEARCHED FROM SIDE TO SIDE OF THE ROAD.

"Me, too," agreed Bobby Hargrew.

"If she should get as far as our house, mother would take her in," said Eve, in her placid way. "But the Romany folk are peculiar people, and they have laws of their own and do not like to be brought under those of other countries."

"Why, they're just tramps, aren't they? Sort of sublimated tramps, perhaps," said Jess.

"Not the real Gypsies," said Laura. "They are very jealous, I have read, of their customs, their laws, and their language. They claim descent in direct line from early Egyptian times. The name of Stanley alone, which is common with them, dates back to William the Conqueror."

"Well, come on!" sighed Jess. "We don't care anything about the Gypsies, and we can't help that girl—just now. If we tried to follow her up stream we would only give those men the idea of the direction in which we went. Let's get on, or we'll never get to Fielding."

"All right," agreed Laura.

"Forward, march!" sang out Bobby. "How's the way, Eve? Right down this hill?"

"Keep parallel with the road. We'll strike another path later," said the Swiss girl, who had rambled all over these hills with her brother.

"Oh, these shoes!" groaned Jess.

"I told you so," exclaimed Laura.

"Bah! what good does it do to repeat *that?*" snapped her chum. "I hate those old mud-scows of mine that Mrs. Case makes me wear when she goes walking with us."

"Well, you certainly wore a fine pair to-day," scoffed Bobby. "I guess it doesn't do to do what Mrs. Case advises against."

"Not if we want to make points for Central High," said Laura, laughing.

"That's so! Where would Jess be to-day if this was a regular scheduled walk, to count for our school in June?" cried Dora.

"Now, rub it in! rub it in!" exclaimed Jess. "Don't you suppose I know I've been a chump without you all telling me so?"

"I do believe it will rain," burst out Dorothy, suddenly. "Doesn't that look like a rain-cloud to you, Laura?"

"Pooh!" said Eve. "Don't be afraid of a little April shower. It won't drown us, that's sure."

"That's all right," agreed Dora, the other twin. "But we don't want to get soaked. If it should start to rain, is there any shelter near?"

"The Gypsy camp, maybe," laughed Bobby, and then went on ahead, singing:

“April showers bring May flowers
And sometimes more than that;
For the unexpected downpour
Often ruins the Easter hat.”

Say, girls, we *would* be in a mess if it should start to rain hard.”

“And that cloud looks threatening,” admitted Nellie Agnew.

“I believe I felt a drop then,” gasped Dora.

“What’s the matter, Chicken Little?” laughed Laura. “Is the sky falling?”

“You can laugh! Maybe it will be a regular flood,” said Jess, ruefully.

“By the way, what caused the flood?” asked Bobby, soberly.

“Folks were so wicked—all but Noah,” replied Dora.

“No,” said Bobby.

“It’s one of Bobby’s ‘burns,’” declared Jess.

“What *did* cause the flood, then?”

“It rained,” said the irrepressible one.

“Come on under this tree, girls!” cried Eve, striding ahead down the hill. “It will only be a passing shower.”

They ran for cover, and the broad branching limbs of the huge cedar Eve had selected faithfully covered them as the brief spring shower went drumming by.

Meanwhile Laura was saying, more thoughtfully:

"We've got to give our best attention to the inter-class and inter-school athletics when school opens again, girls, if we want Central High to stand first at the end of the year. You know we are being beaten right along by the East High and Keyport. Just think! Central High only Number 3 in points that count when the June field day comes. We can't stand for that, can we?"

"I should say not!" cried Bobby. "But we beat 'em last year on the water."

"And we stand first in basketball," added Dora Lockwood.

"But the fact remains we haven't got the championship of the League cinched by any manner of means," returned Laura. "Eve is going to win, I believe, in the shot-putting contests. Mrs. Case says that is on the doubtful list of girls' athletics. But throwing weights isn't going to hurt Eve, or Hester Grimes, that's sure. And look at that girl at Vassar! She put the shot thirty-two feet and three-quarters of an inch when she was only sixteen. Eve can do almost as well."

"I don't know about that, Mother Wit," said the big girl, laughing. "But I'll do my best."

"And your best will beat them all, I believe."

"She'll beat Magdeline Spink, of Lumberport, I know," cried Bobby. "And *she* did all the big 'throws' last year—baseball, basketball, putting the shot, and all of 'em."

"I hope you are right, Bobby," returned the country girl, smiling. She was proud of her strength and physique. Her outdoor life since she was a little child, and what she had inherited from a long line of peasant ancestors was coming into play now for the benefit of Central High's athletic score.

"Now, don't sit down there on the damp ground, Jess. You'll get a case of rheumatism—and a bad case, too."

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Jess, jumping up. "I shouldn't know what to do for it."

"You'd have to take mud baths," giggled Dorothy.

"That road below is in fine shape for that purpose, then," said Jess, looking through the pouring rain at the puddles in the roadway.

"You'd have to wear flannels," said Dora.

"Hah!" cried Bobby. "That's it. Flannels are a sure cure. You know,

"Although it caused within his home
A very serious schism,
He still insisted flannel-cakes
Were good for rheumatism."

"Go on!" exclaimed Jess, laughing. "You sound like 'Alice in Wonderland.'"

"Say, rather, 'Bobby in Blunderland,'" added Laura. "But to get back to athletics——"

"'To return to our muttons,'" quoth Bobby, unrepressed.

"We have a chance to win the championship—our school has—if we can bring the relay teams up to the mark, and win the jumping events. It is on field and track that we have got to gain the points. No doubt of that."

"Then our track teams need strengthening—much," said Nellie Agnew, thoughtfully.

"I should say so!" exclaimed Bobby. "I could put on one of Lil Pendleton's peg-top skirts and beat most of the junior runners right now!"

"If it's as bad as that, we have all got to go into the track athletics, and pull up our score," declared Laura.

"Hurrah!" cried Dorothy, suddenly. "It's stopped raining."

"That little shower didn't even wet under the bushes," said Eve, with satisfaction.

"Let's get along, then, before another comes and washes us away," said Bobby. "Straight ahead, Evangeline?"

"Yes. Right down to that dead oak you see on the lower hillside."

"Good! A mark is set before me, and if my luck holds good I'll reach it. But why prate of 'luck'? Is there such a thing?"

"Give it up. What's the answer?" asked Dora Lockwood, directly behind her.

"Luck is a foolish thing—or a belief in it is," complained Bobby. "List to my tale of woe:

"Why wear a rabbit foot for luck
Or nail a horseshoe on the sill?
For if upon the ice you slip
You'll surely get a spill.

Why cross your fingers in the dark
To keep the witches from your track,
When if, in getting out of bed,
You step upon a tack?"

"Don't sing us any more doggerel, but lead on!" commanded Laura.

Bobby was first at the dead tree. There she stopped, not for breath, but because, below her, in a sheltered hollow, where a spring drifted away across a grassy lawn, there was an encampment. She held up her hand and motioned for silence.

There were three large, covered wagons such as Gypsies usually drive. A dozen horses were tethered where the young grass was particularly lush. A fire over which a big kettle of some savory stew bubbled, burned in the midst of the encampment. There were two gaudily painted canvas tents staked on the green, too, although

from the opened doors of the wagons it was evident that the Gypsies, at this time of year, mainly lived within their vehicles.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bobby, when the other girls were crowding about her, and looking as hard as she was at the camp. "This is what the girl we saw, ran away from."

CHAPTER IV

THE GYPSY QUEEN.

"Isn't that romantic?" cried Jess, under her breath. "Wouldn't you like to live in the open like that, Laura?"

"Sometimes. Then again I might want a steam-heated house," laughed Mother Wit.

"And see that darling little baby!" gasped Nellie Agnew, as a little fellow in gay apparel ran out of one of the tents.

A young woman followed him. She had black hair, and very black eyes, and wore a necklace, and earrings, and bracelets galore. When she ran after the crowing little one the tinkling of these ornaments was audible to the group of girls on the hillside.

This gaily dressed woman caught up the laughing child, and as she turned her gaze went over his head and struck full upon the seven girls.

She set the little boy down quietly, said some-

thing to him, and he ran to cover like a frightened chicken. She spoke another word—aloud—and two men and three other women appeared from the wagons, or tents. They all gazed up at the half-frightened girls.

“Come down, pretty young ladies,” said the gaily bedecked Gypsy woman, in a wheedling tone. “We will not harm you. If you cross our palms with silver we may be able to tell you something pleasant.”

She spoke English well enough; but her address mainly was a formula used to attract trade.

“What’ll we do?” gasped Dorothy Lockwood, clinging to her twin’s hand.

“Keep your courage, Dorry,” said her sister.

“Don’t let them see we’re afraid of them,” Nellie advised, but in a shaking voice.

“And why should we be afraid?” asked Laura, quite calmly.

“Oh, I’ve seen that woman before,” said Eve. “She’s one of the Vareys. They are English Gypsies, like the Stanleys. She was at our place last summer.”

She started down the steep hillside into the camp. The first Gypsy woman said something in the Romany dialect to the others, and the men drifted away, only the woman awaiting the coming of the girls of Central High.

As the seven friends approached they saw that the Varey woman was very handsome, in her bold, dark way. Silver ornaments were entwined in her coarse, blue-black hair; her dress, though garish in color, was neat and of rich material. The bangle, bracelets, necklace and all were either of silver or gold—no sham about them, as Laura Belding very well knew, her father being a jeweler and she knowing something about good jewelry.

“She’s queen of the tribe,” whispered Eve to Laura. “And her husband, Jim Varey, is leader of this clan. He is a horse trader, and sells oilcloth and tinware, while the women sell baskets, and the like, and pick up a quarter now and then telling fortunes.”

“Oh, Eve!” whispered Jess, behind, “did you ever have your fortune told?”

“Yes. It’s silly,” replied Eve, flushing.

“It would be lots of fun,” said Bobby, quite as eager as Jess.

“Let’s all do it,” urged Nellie. “If we give them a little money they probably will not molest us.”

“They wouldn’t dare trouble us, anyway,” said Eve. “And why should they?”

But the other girls, who were not so well acquainted with the Romany people, felt that the

adventure in the Gypsy camp promised much excitement. In a minute they were all on the greensward in front of the tent of the Gypsy queen.

"Cross the poor Gypsy's palm with silver," whined Grace Varey, in a wheedling tone, "and each of you shall learn what the future has in store for you."

"Suppose you can't tell us anything pleasant?" said Bobby Hargrew, boldly. "Then we'd rather not know it."

"But such pretty little ladies are bound to have pretty fortunes," replied the Romany woman. "Come! for a shilling—two shillings, in your American money—I will tell you each what you want to know most."

"You will?"

"Yes, indeed, for but two shillings in your American money."

"She means a quarter," said Eve.

"You try it first, Mother Wit," urged Nellie, nudging Laura.

At the words Grace Varey looked sharply at Laura Belding's earnest face and thoughtful gray eyes. Instantly she said:

"You do not fear. You lead these others. You have a quick mind and you invent things. You are usually first in everything; but power

does not spoil you. You win love as well as admiration—there is a difference. You have parents and at least one brother. You have no sister. There is a——” She shut her eyes for a moment, and hesitated. “There is a black person—a woman—who has something to do with you——”

“Beware of the ‘black man coming with a bundle,’” hissed Bobby, giggling.

“Hush!” exclaimed Jess. “She means Mammy Jinny, Laura’s old nurse.”

Grace Varey had turned swiftly to the scoffing Bobby, and she pointed at her with an accusing finger.

“You do not believe,” she said, quickly. “You are light and thoughtless. You have been spoiled by a doting father. You have no mother—poor child! You are very frivolous and light-hearted; but a great sorrow is coming into your life soon. Into your school life, I believe. It is connected with one of your teachers—a woman. Beware!”

Now, this was very melodramatic; but Bobby, for some reason, could not laugh at it. The woman was too much in earnest. Suddenly Grace Varey’s manner changed, and she whined:

“Cross the poor Gypsy’s palm with silver, and she will tell you more.. Only two shillings,

little lady," and she urged Laura toward the tent.

"All right," said Mother Wit. "If the rest of you are game, I am. But don't back out afterward."

"Not if she is genuine," said Jess, laughing.

Bobby hadn't a word to say; for the moment she was quelled.

But all that the woman had said could be easily explained by the science of deduction—which is merely observation raised to the *nth* power.

Mother Wit went into the tent and found it a rather gloomy place. There was a folding table and two divans, besides some dingy hangings. It was evidently arranged for the purpose of fortune telling and nothing else.

"Sit down, lady," said the Gypsy queen. "Let me see your hand. Do you believe in the reading of character by the lines of the hand?"

"I do not know whether I do or not," replied Laura, calmly.

The woman laughed lightly. She peered at the lines of Laura's palm for a moment, and then said:

"You believe nothing without investigation. For so young a person you are very cautious, and you have much good sense. You are sharp

and intelligent. And you are gentle-hearted. In short, your friends love you very dearly, and you are very faithful to them. Is it not so?"

"You flatter me," said Laura, quietly.

She noted that the woman was no longer holding her hand by the fingers; that she had shifted her own hand to Laura's wrist, and that two of the queen's fingers were resting lightly on her pulse—just as Dr. Agnew held a patient's hand when he counted the throbbing of his heart.

"Oh, I know," went on the Gypsy, in her whining, sing-song way. "You would be faithful in every event. If you had a secret you could keep it—surely. For instance," she added, without changing her tone or raising her voice, "if you had seen the girl with the yellow handkerchief and green skirt, and the little, puckered blue scar high up—near the right temple—you would not tell where she was—which direction she had gone."

That was why the woman was feeling her pulse! Laura knew her heart jumped at the question. She might control her features; but the woman's question had startled her, and that sudden heart-throb had told the shrewd queen what she wished to know.

She smiled lazily, in the dim light, upon the girl before her. She knew that Laura Belding and her friends had seen the fugitive from the Gypsy camp.

CHAPTER V

THE SITUATION LOOKS SERIOUS

LAURA BELDING was as quick to think as she was to act. She remained perfectly calm after the woman's question—calm outwardly, at least. Now she spoke:

"You have spoken a very true thing now. If I had seen such a girl I should not tell you. And this has nothing to do with my own fortune. I have paid you to tell me something about my future—which you seem to know so well."

This spurring phrase put the woman on her mettle. She flushed slowly under her dark skin.

"You are a heretic—you do not believe," she said.

"I must be shown before I believe," returned Laura, confidently.

"Then what comes to you in the future will only prove the case," laughed the Gypsy queen. "You do not believe in palmistry," and she tossed the hand from her lightly.

"Neither do you," said Laura, bluntly. "You did not hold my hand then to enable you to read my palm, but for another purpose."

"You are a shrewd lady," said the Gypsy. "I read character in other ways than by palmistry—it is true."

She looked at Laura for some seconds very earnestly. Of course, Mother Wit did not believe this Gypsy had any occult power; but her deep black eyes were wonderfully compelling, and it might be that there was something in "mind reading."

"You have an intention now that, if followed to its conclusion, will bring you trouble, young lady. Just what that intention may be, or what trouble it may bring, I cannot say exactly," declared the woman, slowly and impressively. "But it deals with a person you have never seen but once—I believe, recently. It seems that you may think you are helping her——"

"That is not prophesying," said Laura, quickly, and interrupting the Gypsy queen. "I shall scarcely think your information worth what I have paid you if you do not do better than that."

"What do you mean?" demanded the woman, hastily, and with a flush coming into her cheek again.

"You know very well that you are warning me not to assist the girl who has run away from this camp," Mother Wit said, boldly.

"Ha! Then you *did* see her?" cried the Gypsy.

"You know I did. You played a trick on me to find out. You are not telling my fortune, but you are endeavoring to find out, through me, about the girl who has run away. And I tell you right now, you will not learn anything further from me—or from the other girls."

The Gypsy queen gazed at her with lowering brows; but Laura Belding neither "shivered nor shook."

"You are quite courageous—for a girl," observed the woman, at last.

"I may be, or not. But I am intelligent enough to know when I am being fooled. Unless you have something of importance to tell me I shall conclude that this fortune-telling seance is ended," and Laura rose from her seat.

"Wait," said the woman, in a low voice. "I will tell you one thing. You may not consider it worth your attention now, little lady; but it will prove so in the end. *Do not cross the Romany folk—it is bad luck!*"

"And I do not believe in 'luck,'" rejoined Laura, smiling. She was determined not to let

the woman see that she was at all frightened. Surely these people would not dare detain, or injure, seven girls.

"An unbeliever!" muttered the Gypsy woman. "We can tell nothing to an unbeliever."

"And having got *from* her all you are likely to get," said Laura, coolly, "your prophecies are ended, are they?"

Queen Grace waved her hand toward the tent flap. "Send in one of your companions," she said. "Any one of them. I am angry with you, and when passion controls me I can see nothing, little lady."

But Laura Belding went forth, fully determined that none of her friends should waste their money upon the chance that the Gypsy queen might see into the future for them.

"It's wicked, anyway," decided Mother Wit. "If God thought it best for us to know what the future had in store for us, he would have put it within the power of every person to know what was coming. Professional palmists, and fortune tellers of all sorts, are merely wicked persons who wish to get foolish people's money!"

She found the six other girls grouped in the middle of the camp, trying to understand one

of the women, who was talking to them, and evidently not a little frightened.

"Oh, Laura! How did it go?" demanded Jess, running to her.

"Very bad. She is a fraud," whispered Mother Wit. "And look out! they think we have seen the girl who ran away and they will try to pump us about her."

"That's what I thought," declared Jess.

"Know all about your past and future, Laura?" asked Bobby Hargrew.

"Dear me! it makes me shiver to think of it," said Nellie. "Does she stir a cauldron, and call on the spirits of the earth and air?"

"She calls on nothing but her own shrewd sense," replied Laura, shortly. "And she can tell you really nothing. Take my advice, girls, and don't try it."

"Oh!" cried the disappointed Bobby "I did so hope she could tell me—more."

"Don't you believe a thing she told you about trouble coming to you at school," said Eve, quietly.

"You needn't worry about that, Bobs," drawled Dora Lockwood. "You know you are always getting into trouble with Gee Gee."

"Maybe she could tell me how to circumvent her," sighed Bobby.

"You'll never get the best of Miss Grace Carrington," said Jess, decidedly; "so give up all hope of *that*."

"Let the little lady try it—do," whined one of the women. "She can learn much, perhaps. Because one fails, that is no reason why another should not succeed."

"I'd like to try it," said Bobby, earnestly.

Laura whispered: "What they want to find out is if we saw the girl who has run away from them, and if we know where she is. Be careful."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive," Laura replied. "She caught me with her questions. She knows I saw the girl. I told her nothing else."

The queen came to the opening of the tent and beckoned to Bobby. She seemed to know instinctively which girl was anxious to try her arts.

"Oh, Bobby," whispered Dorothy. "Maybe you'd better not—as Laura says."

"I want to see for myself," said the other girl, doggedly.

And she moved toward the Gypsy's tent. Laura gathered the other girls about her. One of the women was so near that she could overhear anything said louder than a whisper.

"I want to get away from here at once," said Laura, quietly. "Let us buy any little things they may have for sale, and go on our way. We can get away better now when there are only two men in the camp than we can when those other three—and the bloodhound—get back."

"Oh, mercy me!" gasped Jess. "I had forgotten about the bloodhound."

"Hush!" murmured Laura. "Don't let that woman hear you."

But it was evident that the Gypsy woman had heard. She uttered a sentence or two in Romyany and the two men whom the girls had seen before at the camp appeared. They did not come near, but sat by the roadside that passed through the hollow, and filled their pipes and smoked. It was quite evident that they were on guard.

"We are prisoners!" whispered Nellie, seizing Eve's arm.

"Sh!" admonished Laura again. "Don't let them see that you're afraid. That will only make them the bolder."

But all of the six girls outside the Gypsy's tent were more than a little disturbed. The situation did seem serious.

CHAPTER VI

PRESSING HOSPITALITY

THE other woman had been stirring the great pot of stew. It certainly *did* throw off a delicious odor. Each girl carried a lunch box and they had been about to hunt a pretty spot, near a spring, and satisfy their appetites. Now the woman at the cauldron, who looked a deal like an old witch, turned and waved her spoon, grinned, and said something to the half-frightened visitors.

The younger Gypsy woman interpreted:

"She says you can have some dinner, if you will stay."

"My goodness!" whispered Dora. "I could not eat any of that stuff."

"Some of the Gypsies are good cooks—and that smells delicious," Eve said.

Laura shook her head, but tried to speak kindly. "We could not stop long enough to eat with you," she said. "We must go just as soon as the other girl comes out."

"Better think twice of it, little lady," said the Gypsy woman. "When you eat the bread and salt of the Romany folk they remain your friends."

"And chase you with bloodhounds if you try to get away," spoke Nellie, unguardedly.

It was an unfortunate remark. The woman must have heard it. She turned and spoke to the men again. They rose and stood ready to oppose the departure of the girls of Central High.

Even Laura and Eve felt their courage waver at this. The latter knew that there were no farms near—no inhabited dwellings. The nearest family must be at least two miles away. And this road was lonely at best—and this time of year, when the farmers were just beginning to get their plows into the ground, everybody was busy and there would not be much driving on any of the ridge roads.

"What can we do?" moaned Dorothy Lockwood.

"Will they dare keep us here, Eve?" demanded her twin.

At this strained point in the proceedings there was a sudden excitement among the Gypsies. One of the men started up the road in an easterly direction. The girls looked in some wor-

riment of mind to see what was to happen.

"They've caught the girl!" muttered Jess.

"No. But the dog's coming back," said Laura.

There appeared almost at once the three men who had hunted with the bloodhound—and the hound himself. He was more ferocious-looking close to than at a distance. The six girls shrank together when he passed them, his great dew-laps slobbering and dripping, and his red eyes glancing sullenly from side to side.

The Gypsies laughed when they saw fear so plainly displayed in the countenances of the six girls. The bloodhound was fastened to one of the wagon wheels, and then the Romany folk paid no particular attention to their visitors.

It was plain that they considered the girls would not go far when they saw that the dog could be unleashed and set upon their trail. Nellie Agnew began to cry, but Laura was growing angry.

"Just wait till Bobby comes out of that tent. I'm going to start right off along the road——"

"You won't ever dare to!" gasped Dora.

"Yes, I will. They won't dare set a dog like that on us——"

Just then the little boy they had first seen ran out of the other tent. He was evidently

aiming for his father, who was a low-browed man with huge hoops of gold in his ears, and a ferocious mustache.

But the little one had to pass the dog. He saw him, gave a shriek of delight, and ran straight at the huge and savage-looking creature!

The girls were, for an instant, greatly startled. Then they were amazed to see the little fellow roll the bloodhound over and laugh and shriek in delight—while the dog nuzzled the baby and seemed to like the play.

“My goodness!” cried Jess. “That dog’s nothing but a bluff!”

“I believe you,” said Laura. “I’ve heard of a dog’s bark being worse than his bite; but in this case his appearance is a whole lot worse than his real nature. I guess they just keep him for his fearful looks and his ability to trail anything.”

“Girls included,” murmured Dora. “I don’t want him trailing me.”

The Gypsies had tried to call the little boy away from the huge dog. But they knew that the appearance of the hound would no longer strike terror to the hearts of their visitors.

Indeed, Laura, who was naturally unafraid of dogs, as she was of horses, went over to the big,

ugly-looking brute, and patted his head. He raised up and looked at her, and his bloodshot eyes *did* have a fearful appearance; but he lapped her hand with his soft tongue—and *that* bogey was laid!

“Just as soon as Bobby comes out, we’ll go, girls,” said Laura, confidently. “They won’t dare lay a finger on us.”

At that moment Bobby burst from the fortune-teller’s tent. She presented a wonderful and a shocking sight to her friends, for usually they saw her laughing. She was in tears and she ran to Laura and clung to her in a frightened way.

“Oh! oh!” she cried. “I want to get away from this horrid place. Do let’s go, Mother Wit! Please do!”

“What’s the matter with you, Bobby?” demanded Jess, nervously. “You give me the creeps.”

“These hateful people——” began Dora Lockwood, when the Gypsy queen appeared at the tent entrance. Her eyes sparkled and her handsome face was flushed. She called something in a low, clear voice, and the men, who had gathered in a knot at one side, started toward her.

One of them unfastened the dog again and held the end of the chain. The queen was talking excitedly in their own tongue to the others.

Laura shook Bobby a little and said, shrewdly:

"I guess she got out of you what she wanted to know, eh?"

Bobby only sobbed.

"Did you tell her what direction that girl was going—that she was wading up stream?"

"Oh, yes! I did!" gasped Bobby. "She made me."

"Well, it can't be helped. It's really none of our business," said Laura. "But if they try to stop us from going away now, we've got to scatter and run. They can't hold us all very well, and one of us will surely find some house——"

"They won't dare stop us," said Eve, decidedly.

At that moment Nell held up her hand. "Hark!" she exclaimed. "What is that?"

The rattling of a heavy wagon coming down the road from the east was audible. Eve instantly ran out to the edge of the road. One of the Gypsies uttered a shrill, warning cry, and the men turned to intercept the girls.

But into view came the heads of a team of

bay horses, and then a farm-wagon, with a be-whiskered man in high boots on the seat, driving the team.

"Hullo! Whoa!" exclaimed the farmer, when he saw Eve. "I declare! Is that you, Evie?"

"Why, Mr. Crook! how glad I am to see you," said the Swiss girl. "What have you got in the wagon? Just a few bags? Then you can give us a lift, can't you? We are tired walking."

"Sure I can, Miss Evie," replied the farmer. "What are you girls doin' with these 'Gyptians? Gettin' your fortunes told?"

"Oh, we just stopped here for a minute," said Eve, carelessly.

The Gypsies had hesitated to approach closer. The men began to slip away, one after the other.

"Pile in, girls," said the farmer, hospitably. "I'm going five or six miles on this road. Bound for Fielding?"

"Yes, we are," replied Eve, as her friends gratefully clambered into the end of the wagon.

"Oh, dear me!" whispered Jess. "What luck this is! I believe those folks would have tried to keep us."

"I don't know about that," returned her

chum. "But the woman certainly managed to frighten Bobby most thoroughly."

Bobby had hushed her sobs. But even when the wagon had started again and the Gypsy camp was out of sight, she was not willing to talk about what the Varey woman had told her.

CHAPTER VII

THE YELLOW KERCHIEF AGAIN

SCHOOL opened the next Monday and the girls of Central High took up their tasks "for the last heat" of the year, as Jess Morse expressed it.

"And I'm glad," she told her chum, Laura Belding, "Just think! next Fall we'll be seniors."

"Wishing your life away," laughed Laura. "We were awfully glad to be juniors, I remember."

"Sure. But we'll boss the school next fall," said Jess.

"We've done very well for juniors, especially in athletics," observed Laura. "Why, practically, our bunch has dominated athletics for a year, now. We made the eight-oared shell in our sophomore year."

"True. And the champion basketball team, too."

"And Eve is going to qualify for the broad

jump as well as the shot-put, I verily believe," said Laura. "I'm glad I found that girl and got her to come to Central High instead of going to Keyport."

"She was a lucky find," admitted Jess. "And she wasn't much afraid of those Gypsies last week—did you notice?"

"Of course she wasn't. She told me this morning that the constable over there looked for the camp, but the Romany folk had moved on."

"I wonder if they caught that girl in the yellow kerchief," said Jess, thoughtfully.

"Don't know. But they managed to scare Bobby pretty thoroughly," said Laura. "I never did see Bobby Hargrew quite so impressed."

Jess smiled. "She seemed to know something about you, too, Laura—that Gypsy queen. She knew you had a negro mammy at home."

"I don't know how she guessed that," admitted Laura. "But I believe all that fortune telling is foolishness. If she came to the house and told Mammy Jinny half what she did us, Mammy would be scared to death. We had a good laugh on the dear old thing yesterday. She's had a cold for several days and mother insisted upon calling Dr. Agnew in to see her."

You know how Nellie's father is—always joking and the like; and he enjoys puzzling Mammy Jinny. So when he had examined her he said:

“‘Mammy, the trouble is in your thorax, larynx and epiglottis.’

“‘Ma soul an’ body, Doctor!’ exclaimed Mammy, turning gray. ‘An’ I only t’ought I had a so’ t’roat.’”

“But Mammy does like to use long words herself,” chuckled Jess. “She will remember those words and spring them on you some time. Remember when her nephew had the rheumatism?”

“Of course,” Laura replied. “We asked her if it was the inflammatory kind and she said:

“‘Sho’ it’s exclamatory rheumatism. He yells all de time.’”

“But I *do* wonder,” said Jess, again, “if the Gypsies caught that girl. She must have wanted badly to get away from them to have run the risk of being chased by a bloodhound.”

“And she was smart, too,” Laura agreed. “Running on that wall and wading in the stream threw the dog off the scent.”

“If one of us had done such a thing as that when the water was so cold we would have got our ‘never-get-over,’” declared Jess.

"I believe you. And a lot of us girls are 'tender-feet,' as Chet says, at this time of year. We have been in the house too much. I tell you, Jess, we've got to get 'em out in the field just as soon as it's dry enough. Bill Jackway is working on the track and Mrs. Case says she thinks we can start outdoor relay practice and quarter-mile running on Saturday—if it's pleasant."

"That's what we have got to practice up on, too, if we want to win the points we need to put Central High at the top of the list," agreed her chum.

"I should say!"

The moment they were freed from the regular lessons of the day Laura and Jess and their particular friends made for the handsome gym. building and athletic field that Colonel Richard Swayne had made possible for them. Bobby Hargrew was very much down in the mouth, for she had gone up against Miss Carrington at several points and the martinet had been very severe with the irrepressible.

"I tell you what," growled Bobby, "I believe that little brother of Alice Long hit it off about right when it comes to teachers."

"How is that?" asked Laura.

"Why, he came home after going to school a

few days last Fall, and says he: 'I don't think teachers know much, anyway. They keep asking you questions all the time.' "

"I agree with you there," Jess said. "And such useless questions! Why, if you answered them literally half the time you'd be swamped in demerits. For instance, did you notice that one to-day: 'Why did Hannibal cross the Alps?' I felt just like answering: 'For the same reason the chicken crossed the road!'" "

The girls got into their gym. suits in a hurry and then played passball for a while, and, when well warmed up, went out on the field. Mrs. Case appeared and tried some of the younger ones out in relay running, while several of the bigger ones, including Eve, tried the broad jump, and Laura, and Jess, and more of the juniors trotted around the cinder path.

Central High had to develop a first-class sprinter to win that event at the June tourney, and, as Laura said, "it was a question where the lightning would strike." Every girl who *would* run—even down to the freshies—was to be tried out. As for the relay races, that was a matter of general interest. To-day Mrs. Case's whistle blew in half an hour, and every girl on the field lined up for a "shuttle relay"

—half of them on one line and half on the other, fifty yards apart.

At the sound of the whistle Number 1 girl shot off across the running space and touched Number 2, the latter dashing back to touch Number 3, and so on until the last girl crossed the line at the finish. This is a splendid form of relay-racing, for it keeps the girls on the alert, and the distance is not too great for any girl, who has a physician's approval, to run.

Mrs. Case, however, was extremely careful—as was Dr. Agnew, the medical inspector—as to the condition of the girls before they entered upon any very serious training. The afternoons of this first week of school were spent in working out the girls gradually, the instructor learning what they really could do. Nor were any of the girls allowed to work on the track, or in the gym., two days in succession.

But Saturday afternoon was devoted to real work and the making up of the relay teams for practice during the spring. It chanced to be a glorious day, too, and the field was well attended. Bobby Hargrew was faithfully practicing for the quarter-mile sprint. She was as fast as anybody in the junior class, and for once was really putting her mind to the work.

"If Gee Gee doesn't hamper me too much with conditions and extra work, maybe I can be of some help to the school," spoke Miss Bobby. "But I can see plainly she's got it in for me."

"That's what the Gypsy fortune-teller told you," returned Jess. "Didn't she warn you to beware of one of your teachers—and a woman?"

Bobby's light-hearted chatter was stilled and she paled as Jess reminded her of the Gypsy woman.

"Pooh!" Laura quickly said. "There is nothing in that foolishness." Bobby had utterly refused to tell them what Grace Varey, the Gypsy queen, had told her in the tent. "She could easily see that Bobby was full of good spirits and that she must always be in difficulties with her teachers—and of course it was safe to guess that she would have trouble with a female teacher. I wouldn't give a minute's thought to such foolishness."

But Bobby would not be led to say anything farther, and was very quiet for a time.

She was with Laura and the other juniors, however, over by the gate, when Nell Agnew made her great discovery. The girls had been playing captain's ball on one of the courts, and

they were all warm and tired. Wrapped in their blanket coats, on which Mrs. Case insisted at this time of the year, they were resting on the bench which faced the gateway, and the gate was open.

"My goodness me!" gasped the doctor's daughter, suddenly, "isn't that the same girl?"

"Huh?" asked Bobby. "Isn't what the same girl? You're as lucid as mud, Nell."

"Out there! Quick, Laura—don't you see her?"

Laura Belding craned her neck to see outside the yard. Across the street a girl was passing slowly. They could not see her face, and she was wrapped in a long cloak—or waterproof garment.

"Look at that yellow handkerchief!" exclaimed Jess.

"I saw it—and I saw her face," said Nellie

"That's like the girl we saw up there on the ridge," admitted Laura, slowly.

"The Gypsy girl!" exclaimed Jess, in excitement.

"It *was* she. I saw her face," repeated Nell.

"Now, what do you know about that?" cried Jess. "Why, she must have gotten away from those people, after all. I'm glad of it."

Bobby said never a word, but she stared after

the yellow kerchief, which showed plainly above the collar of the mantle the strange girl wore. And while her mates discussed with interest the appearance in town of the fugitive from the Gypsy camp, Bobby was only thoughtful.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GIRL IN THE STORM

Now, Bobby Hargrew was not naturally a secretive girl. Far from it. Her mates noted, however, that of late she had grown quieter. Ever since their adventure with the Gypsies she had seemed distraught at times, and not at all like her usual merry, light-hearted self.

"That horrid Gypsy woman told her something that scared her," Jess Morse said to Laura Belding. "I didn't think Bobby would be so easily gulled."

"Those people know how to make things seem awful real, I expect," returned her chum, thoughtfully. "If I had not been on my guard, and had the woman not tried to learn something from me, instead of attempting to mystify me, I expect I would have fallen under her spell."

"Nonsense!" laughed Jess.

"Well, it seems Bobby was impressed," said Laura.

"I should say she was. And whatever the woman told her, it is something that is supposed to happen in the future. Bobby is looking forward to it with terror."

"I wish I knew what it was."

"But Bobs won't take you into her confidence," sighed Jess.

"No. I've sounded her. And it is no mere trouble that she expects in school. It is something more serious than Miss Carrington's severity," Laura rejoined.

Clara Hargrew probably had more friends among the girls of Central High than any other girl on the Hill; yet she had not one "crush." She was "hail-fellow-well-met" with all her schoolmates, and never paired off with any particular girl. She had nobody in whom she would naturally confide—not even at home.

For there had been no mother in the Hargrew home for several years. Mr. Hargrew idolized Bobby, who was the oldest of his three girls; but a father can never be like a mother to a girl. Her two sisters were small—the youngest only six years old. The housekeeper and nurse looked out for the little girls; but Bobby was answerable to nobody but her father, and he was a very easy-going man indeed. He was proud of Bobby, and of her smartness and

whimsicality; and about everything she did was right in his eyes.

The fact that his oldest daughter had been a good deal of a tomboy never troubled the groceryman in the least. "She was as good as any boy," he often laughingly said, and it was he who had nicknamed her "Bobby."

But the girl was just now at the age and stage of growth when she needed a mother's advice and companionship more than any other time in her life. And she felt woefully alone these days!

She was usually the life of the house when she was indoors, and the little girls, Elsie and Mabel, loved to have her as their playmate. In the evenings, too, she was used to being much with her father. But of late Mr. Hargrew had been going out one or two evenings each week—a new practice for him—and on these evenings when her father was absent, Bobby was so gloomy that it was not long before the little girls complained.

"You're sick, child," declared Mrs. Ballister, the old lady who had been with them since long before Mrs. Hargrew died.

"No, I'm not," declared Bobby.

"Then' you've done something that's settin' heavy on your conscience," declared the old

lady, nodding. "Nothing else would make you so quiet, Clara."

And Bobby felt too miserable to "answer back," and swallowed the accusation without comment.

It was early in the week following the Saturday on which the girls had seen the fugitive from the Gypsy camp passing the athletic field. Soon after the mid-day recess a sudden spring thunder storm came up, the sky darkened, the air grew thick, and sharp lightning played across the clouds before the threatened downpour.

Some of the girls were so frightened that they ran in from the recreation ground before the gong rang. The heavens were overcast and the trees before the schoolhouse began to writhe in the rising wind.

The first heavy drops were falling when Bobby, who had been excused by Miss Carrington to do an errand during the recess, turned the corner and faced the sudden blast. It swooped down upon her with surprising power, whirled her around, flung her against the fence, and then, in rebounding, she found herself in another person's arms.

"Oh, dear me! Excuse me—do!" gasped Bobby, blinded for the moment and clinging to the person with whom she had collided. "I—I didn't mean to run you down."

At that instant there was a blinding flash followed by a roll of thunder that seemed to march clear across the sky. Bobby felt this girl whom she clung to shrink and tremble at the sound. Now, Bobby herself was not particularly afraid of thunder and lightning, and she immediately grew braver.

"Come on!" she said. "We'll get wet here. Let's run into the boys' vestibule—that's nearest."

The boys' yard was empty; indeed, the afternoon session had been called to order now in all the classrooms. Bobby and the strange girl ran, half blindly, into the graveled yard and up the steps.

Just as they entered the vestibule the down-pour came. The flood descended and had they been out in it half a minute longer the fugitives would have been saturated.

"Just in time!" cried Bobby, attempting to open the inner door.

"Oh! I can't go in there," stammered the strange girl.

"Nor I guess I can't, either," said Bobby, half laughing, half breathless. "It's locked—and the wind is blowing the rain right into this vestibule. Come on! Let's shut this outside door."

The half of the two-leaved door of the vestibule which had been open was heavy; but

Bobby's companion proved to be a strong and rugged girl, and together they managed to close it. Then, with the rain and wind shut out, although the roar of the elements was still loud in their ears, the two girls were able to examine each other.

And instantly Bobby Hargrew forgot all about the thunder, and lightning, and rain. She stared at the girl cowering in the corner, who winced every time the lightning played across the sky, and closed her eyes with her palms to the reverberation of the thunder.

The girl was perhaps a couple of years older Bobby herself. She was dark and had a tangle of black hair which was dressed indifferently. A woolen cap was drawn down almost to her ears. She was rather scrubbily dressed, and nothing that she wore looked very clean or very new. The waist she had on was cut low at the neck—so low that the girl had tied loosely around her throat a soft, yellow muffler.

Although the old brown cloak she wore hid her green skirt, Bobby knew that the girl before her was the one she and her friends had seen escaping from the Gypsy camp nearly a fortnight before. The girl who had been unafraid of pursuit by the bloodhound, and had run upon stone fences and waded in an ice-cold mountain

brook to hide her trail, now cowered in the vestibule of the schoolhouse, in a nervous tremor because of the thunderstorm.

"My! but you *are* scared of lightning, aren't you?" exclaimed Bobby, after a minute, and when the noise of the elements had somewhat ceased.

"I—I always am," gasped the girl.

"The lightning won't hurt you—at least, the lightning you *see* will never hurt you, my father says," added Bobby. "The danger is all past by the time you see the flash of it."

"But I can't help being frightened," replied the girl.

"No. I suppose not. And I guess you are brave enough about other things to make up, eh?"

The girl looked up at her, but was evidently puzzled. She glanced through the glass doors of the building into the corridor.

"Is this the school building?" she asked, quickly.

"Yes. But this is the boys' entrance, so I don't want to ring. I'd get scolded for coming here," said Bobby.

"Oh, don't ring!" exclaimed the girl, putting a timid hand upon Bobby's arm. "This is the big school, isn't it?"

"It's the biggest in town. It's Central High," said Bobby, proudly.

"You go here to school, of course?" asked the girl, somewhat wistfully.

"Yes. I'm a junior."

The other shook her head. The grading of the school was evidently not understood by the Gypsy girl.

"Say! do you have many teachers in this school?" she asked.

"Yes. There's enough of them," replied Bobby, grumblingly.

"Women, too?"

"Yes. Some women."

"Who are they?" asked the girl, quickly.
"What's their names?"

The thunder was rolling away now, but the rain was still beating down in such volume that the girls could not venture forth. Bobby would have gotten wet in running around to the girls' entrance.

"Why," she said, studying the Gypsy's face in a puzzled way. "There's Miss Gould."

"Gould? That's not her whole name, is it?" asked this curious girl.

"Miss Marjorie Gould."

"Say it slow—say the letters," commanded the Gypsy girl.

Bobby, much amazed, began:

"M-a-r-j-o-r-i-e G-o-u-l-d."

The strange girl shook her head. Bobby saw that she had been counting the letters of Miss Gould's name on her fingers, and she asked:

"Don't you read English?"

"No. I'm 'Austrian. I know some German. A woman taught me. But I never went to school—never to a school like this," said the Gypsy girl, with a sigh.

"Who are you?" asked Bobby, deeply interested.

"You—you can call me Margit—Margit Salgo, from 'Austria."

Now, this puzzled Bobby Hargrew more than ever, for she knew that the Gypsies the girl had been with were English. Yet she was afraid of frightening the girl by telling her what she already knew about her. And immediately the Gypsy girl asked her another question:

"Spell me some of their other names, will you?"

"Whose other names?"

"The lady teachers," replied Margit, her black eyes flashing eagerly.

"Why—why, there's Mrs. Case," stammered Bobby.

"How do you spell the letters?"

"R-o-s-e C-a-s-e," said Bobby, slowly.

"No! no!" exclaimed Margit. "Not enough. Too short."

"But don't you know the name of the woman you are looking for?"

"I didn't say I was looking for anybody," said Margit, with suspicion. "I am just curious."

"And you can't repeat the name?"

"I never heard it repeated. I only know how many letters there are. I saw it on a card. I counted the letters," said the girl, with a shrewd light in her eyes. "Now! haven't you any more lady teachers here?"

"There's Gee Gee!" exclaimed Bobby, with half a chuckle, amused at the thought of Miss Carrington being mixed up in any manner with this half-wild Gypsy girl.

"Too short," said the other, shaking her head decidedly.

"Oh, her real name is long enough. It's Grace G. Carrington."

"Spell it out," commanded Margit Salgo, eagerly.

Bobby did so, but the girl shook her head. "Not enough letters," she declared.

"Why—there are sixteen letters to Miss Car-

ington's name," said Bobby, wonderingly. "How many are there to the name you are hunting for?"

"Two more," said Margit, promptly.

"Eighteen?"

"Yes. Now, don't you tell anybody what I say. That's a good girl," urged the other.

"You're not afraid of me, are you?" asked Bobby, in wonder.

"I'm afraid of everybody," muttered the girl.

"You've—you've run away from somebody?" ventured Bobby, fearing to startle the fugitive by telling her just how much she *did* know.

"Never you mind about me. Thank you for what you've told me. I—I guess the worst of it's over now, and I'll go," said Margit, and she tugged at the knob of the outer door.

The rain was still falling fast; but the thunder only muttered in the distance and the electric display had entirely passed.

"Wait!" cried Bobby, earnestly. "Maybe I can help you some more."

"No. I don't need anybody to help me. I can take care of myself," replied the Gypsy girl, sullenly.

She mastered the door-latch, pulled the door open, and ran out into the rain. In half a min-

ute she was flying up the street, and not until she was out of sight did Bobby remember something that might be of great importance in explaining the mystery.

“Why, Miss Carrington always writes her name ‘Grace *Gee* Carrington,’” exclaimed Bobby. “There’s the eighteen letters that the girl is looking for. I never thought of that!”

CHAPTER IX

THE GYPSIES AGAIN

WHEN the rain stopped, Bobby went around to the other entrance and reported herself to Miss Carrington. That teacher always doubted Bobby's excuses, and this time she shook her head over the girl's tardiness.

"You told me you had plenty of time to do your errand within the limit of the recess, Miss Hargrew," said Gee Gee. "Do better next time, please."

"She always acts as though she thought I had an India rubber imagination," muttered Bobby, to her nearest seatmate, "and that I was always stretching it."

"Miss Hargrew, please refrain from communicating in lesson time!" snapped the ever-watchful teacher.

"Dear me!" murmured Bobby. "She's got me again. I *do* have the worst luck."

And then she wondered what Miss Carrington knew about the strange Gypsy girl, or what Margit knew about Gee Gee.

"I'd like to get better acquainted with that girl," thought Bobby. "There is a mystery about her—and Gee Gee is in it."

But she said nothing to any of the other juniors, judging it best to keep her own counsel. Meanwhile she kept a keen lookout for the girl to appear about the school building again. Several days passed, however, and Bobby saw nothing of her.

Meanwhile the girls who were earnest in the work of putting Central High ahead in the inter-school athletic competition, worked hard on the field and under Mrs. Case's eye in the gymnasium.

Bobby was really doing her best on the track. Never had she settled down to such thorough work in any branch of athletics as she had in this effort to make a record for the quarter-mile. Central High needed the points that a champion sprinter could win, just as the school needed the points putting the shot, and the broad jump, would add to its record.

Bobby, the year before, had acted as coxswain of the eight-oared crew; and she had played all season on the big basketball team—the champion nine. But this running was different work.

Now she had no teammates to encourage her, or to keep her up to the mark. It was just what she could do for the school by herself.

"Just by your lonesome, Bobby," Laura Belding told her. "To win the quarter-mile will mean two whole points in June. Think of that! And you can do it."

"I don't know," returned the other girl, in some despondency. "Gee Gee'll likely get something on me before the June meet, and then where'll we be?"

"But you don't *have* to do things to make Miss Carrington give you demerits."

"Bah! I don't have to do anything at all to get demerits. She's just expecting me to do something all the time, and she 'jumps' me without giving me a chance. Any other girl in the school can cut up much worse than I do and never get a sour look; but I—oh, dear!"

"You see what it is to have a reputation for mischief," said Laura, half inclined to laugh. "Can't you cut out the frolic for this one term? Cure yourself of practical joking and 'joshing' poor Miss Carrington."

"Great Cæsar!" ejaculated Bobby. "How could I ever do it?"

Nevertheless, with all her reckless talk, she was really trying her very best to keep out of difficulties in school, and on the other hand to make the best time possible on the cinder track.

Mrs. Case began to try her out now and then, and held the watch on her. Bobby wanted to

know how fast she made the quarter; but the instructor put up her watch with a smile and a head-shake.

"That I sha'n't tell you, Miss Hargrew. Not yet. You do your best; that's what you are to do. If you fall back, or I see you losing form, you'll hear about it soon enough."

One morning before school-time Bobby heard Mrs. Ballister scolding at the back door. The old housekeeper did not often scold the maid, for she was a dear old lady and, as Bobby herself said, "as mild-tempered as a lamb." But she heard her say:

"Be off with you! We've nothing for you. Scalawags like you shouldn't prosper—filling a girl's silly head full of more silliness. Go on at once!"

Somehow Bobby had a premonition of what the trouble was about. She ran out upon the side porch and saw two Gypsy women coming around the path from the rear of the house. They were the two who had been at Queen Grace Varey's camp that day on the ridge when the girls of Central High had had their adventure.

"Here is a little lady," whined the old woman. "She will buy of us," lifting up her baskets.

"No, no," said Bobby, shaking her head vigorously.

The other woman recognized her and touched the arm of her companion warningly.

"Surely the little lady will not be unkind to the poor Romany," she whined. "She does not forget what Queen Grace told her?"

"I want to forget it," declared Bobby, with flushed face. "I have nothing for you. Go away—do!"

"Ah-ha, little lady!" chuckled the woman, with a leer. "You are mistress here now—and you can send us away. But remember! Your father will bring home another mistress before mid-summer."

The two women laughed harshly, and turned away, going slowly out of the yard. Bobby remained upon the porch until she had winked back the tears—and bitter tears they were, indeed—and so went slowly in to breakfast.

"Those horrid 'Gyptians,'" Mrs. Ballister was saying. "I caught them out there trying to tell Sally's fortune. They'd make her believe she was going to fall heir to a fortune, or get a husband, or something, and then we'd lose the best kitchen girl we ever had."

But Bobby felt too serious to smile at the old lady's sputtering. Despite what Laura Belding said, there *must* be something in the fortunes the Gypsy queen told! How did she know so much about *her*? Bobby asked herself.

She knew that Bobby had no mother and that she was sure to get into trouble with her teachers. And now the prophecy she had made that her father would bring home a new wife before mid-summer rankled in Bobby Hargrew's mind like a barbed arrow. .

For Bobby loved her father very dearly, and had been for years his confidante. It had long been agreed between them that she was going to be his partner in the grocery business, just as though she had been born a boy. And as soon as the little girls were big enough they were to go away to boarding school, Mrs. Ballister should be relieved of the responsibility of the house, and Bobby was going to be the real mistress of the Hargrew home.

And suppose, instead of all these things, Father Tom should bring home a new mother to reign over them? The thought was ever in Bobby's mind these days. Not that she had any reason to fear the coming of a step-mother. The only girl at Central High whom she knew that had a step-mother loved her very dearly and made as much of her as though she had been two real mothers. Sue Blakesley had been without a mother long enough to appreciate even a substitute.

But Bobby and Mr. Hargrew had been such

close friends and comrades that the girl was jealous of such a possibility as anybody coming into her father's life who could take her place in any degree. She worried over the Gypsy's prophecy continually; she wet her pillow at night with bitter tears because of it, and it sobered and changed her to her schoolmates, as we have seen.

It was a very serious and imminent trouble indeed to the warm-hearted, impulsive girl.

On her way to school that morning she chanced to turn the corner into Whiffle Street just as a dark-browed, shuffling fellow crossed from the other side and trailed along ahead of her toward the schoolhouse. Bobby knew that black face, and the huge gold hoops in his ears, at once. It was the husband of the Gypsy queen.

"Oh, I wonder if the whole encampment is in town hunting for that poor girl, Margit?" thought Bobby. "They are such strange, wicked folk. And look at him—why, that's Gee Gee!"

The lady ahead on the walk, behind whom the Gypsy was walking so stealthily, was none other than Miss Carrington herself. Instantly Bobby's thought flashed to the mysterious inquiries of the girl, Margit Salgo, about the teacher at Central High.

Bobby involuntarily quickened her steps. She was afraid of these Gypsies; but she was curious,

too. The whole block was deserted, it seemed, save for herself, Gee Gee, and the man.

Suddenly he hastened his long stride and overtook the teacher. Bobby knew that the fellow accosted Miss Carrington. The lady halted, and shrank a little. But she did not scream, or otherwise betray fear.

"No, lady. Ah'm no beggar. Ma nyme's Jim Varey an' ah'm honest man, so I be. Ah come out o' Leeds, in Yorkshire, an' we be trav-elin', me an' mine. Wait, lady! Ah've summat tae show ye."

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a card. He held this card so that Miss Carrington could read what was printed, or written, on it. And she did so, as was evident to Bobby, for she started back a little and uttered a murmured exclamation.

"Ah sees ye knaw ye'r awn nyme, lidy," said Jim Varey, shrewdly. "Yer the lady we're lookin' for, mayhap. 'Tis private business——"

"I can have no business with you, man," exclaimed Miss Carrington. "Why, you're a Gypsy!"

"Aye. I'm Gypsy. An' so was ma fawther an' mither, an' their fawthers an' mithers before 'em. We'm proud of the Romany blood. 'An' more'n 'us, lady, has mixed with the Romany—

an' in other climes aside Yorkshire. But all Roman is one, wherever vound. Ye know that, lidy."

"I don't know what you mean! I don't know what you are talking about! What do you want of me?" cried Miss Carrington, quite wildly.

The man drew closer. Bobby was really frightened, too. She opened her own mouth to shriek for help. But the Gypsy did not touch the teacher. Instead, he said in a low, but perfectly clear, voice, so that Bobby heard it plainly:

"I would speak to you, lidy, of the child of Belas Salgo."

Miss Carrington uttered a stifled shriek. Bobby sprang forward, finding her own voice now, and using it to good purpose, too. A door banged, and a gentleman ran out of his house and down to the gate, where the Gypsy had stopped Miss Carrington.

It chanced to be Franklin Sharp, the principal of Central High. Jim Varey saw him coming, glanced swiftly around, evidently considered the time and place unfavorable for further troubling the teacher, and so broke into a run and disappeared.

Mr. Sharp caught Gee Gee before she fell. But she did not utterly lose consciousness.

Bobby had caught her hand and clung to it. The girl heard Gee Gee murmur:

"There was no child! There was no child! Oh! Poor Anne! Poor Anne!"

"Let us take her into the house," said Mr. Sharp, kindly. "That ruffian has scared her, I believe. Could you identify him, do you think, Miss Hargrew?"

"Yes, sir," declared Bobby, tremblingly.

But Miss Carrington cried: "Oh, no! Oh, no! Don't go after him—do nothing to him."

And she continued to cry and moan while they took her into the house and put her in the care of Mrs. Sharp. That forenoon Gee Gee did not appear before her classes at Central High. But she was present at the afternoon session and Bobby thought her quite as stern and hard as ever. Nor did the teacher say a word to the girl about the Gypsy, or mention the occasion in any way.

CHAPTER X

EVE'S ADVENTURE

EVE SITZ had plenty to do out of school hours when she was at home. Nobody could afford to be idle at the Sitz farm. But she found time, too, to put on an old skirt, gym. shoes, and a sweater, and go down behind the barn to practice her broad jump and to throw a baseball at the high board fence behind the sheepfold.

She grew expert indeed in ball throwing, and occasionally when Otto, her brother, caught her at this exercise, he marvelled that his sister could throw the horsehide farther and straighter than he.

"Dot beats it all, mein cracious!" gasped Otto, who was older than Eve by several years, had never been to school in this new country, and was one who would never be able to speak English without a strong accent. "How a girl can t'row a pall like dot. I neffer!"

"You wait till June, Otto," replied his sister, in German. "If you come to the big field

day of the Centerport High Schools, you will see that girls can do quite well in athletics. You know how we can row, and you saw us play basketball. Wait till you see the Central High girls on track and field!"

"A lot of foolishness," croaked Otto. "You go to the school to learn to be smart, no?"

"No," replied Eve, laughing at him. "I am smart in the first place, or I would not go. And don't I help mother just as much—and milk—and feed the pigs and chickens—and all that? Wait till you see me put the shot. I am going to win a whole point for the school if I am champion shot-putter."

"Ach! It is beyond me," declared Otto, walking off to attend to his work.

The family—plain Swiss folk as they were—thought Eve quite mad over these "foolish athletics." They had no such things in the schools at home—in the old country. Yet Father and Mother Sitz were secretly proud of their big and handsome daughter. She was growing up "American." That was something to be achieved. They had come of peasant stock, and hoped that their girl, at least, would mix with a more highly educated class of young folk in this new country.

So, if Eve thought that the tasks which

usually fell to her nights and mornings, and on Saturdays, were not sufficient to keep her in what she called "condition," her parents made no objection to her throwing baseballs, or jumping, or taking long walks, or riding on the old gray mare's back over the North pasture.

And it was upon one of these rides that she fell upon her second adventure that Spring with the Gypsies—or, at least, with one of the tribe.

It occurred on the Saturday morning following Miss Carrington's meeting with Jim Varey, husband of the Gypsy queen. Of course, Bobby Hargrew had said nothing about this mysterious connection of the martinet teacher with the roving band of "Egyptians"; it was not her secret, and although Bobby might be an innocent gossip, she was no tale-bearer.

Eve finished her morning's work, "pegged" the baseball at the target she had marked with a brush on the sheepfold fence, managing to scare all the woolly muttons out of at least half of their senses, and then grabbed up a bridle and ran down to the pasture bars and whistled for the mare.

The old horse came cantering across the field. Eve never failed to have a lump of sugar in her pocket, and the old girl nuzzled around for it and would not be content until she had munched

it. Meanwhile Eve slipped on the bridle and sprang upon the creature's back.

Hester Grimes, and Lily Pendleton, and some of the wealthier girls who went to Central High, rode horseback in the parks. They went to a riding school and cantered around a tanbark ring, and then rode, very demurely, two and two, upon old broken-kneed hacks through the bridle-paths. Mrs. Case approved of horseback exercise for girls, either astride or side-saddle, as they pleased; but she certainly would have held her breath in fear had she seen Eve Sitz career down the rocky pasture upon her mount on this keen-aired morning.

It had rained over night and the bushes were still dripping. Every time a sharp hoof of the unshod mare tore up a clod as she cantered, Eve got the scent of the wet earth in her nostrils, and drank it in with long and deep inhalations. She rode the mare with a loose rein and let her take her head.

They dashed down the hill and through the narrow path that crossed a piece of Mr. Sitz's swamp land. Here the dogwood was budding and a few Judas-trees displayed a purple blush, as though a colored mist hung about them. In a few days the bushes would burst forth in full flower.

Eve rode fast along the swamp path. It was narrow, and to have ventured three yards upon either side would have been to sink, horse and all, into the quagmire. This was a waste piece of the farm that her father hoped to drain at some time, but now it was only a covert for birds and frogs.

But suddenly, as the girl rode fast, she thought she heard a cry. She half checked her mount; but the sound was not repeated.

A minute later the gray mare was through the marsh-piece and out upon the field beyond. Eve intended circling around by Peveril Pond and so reach home again by another path; yet the mysterious cry she had heard back there in the swamp-piece kept returning to her mind.

Suppose it had been a real cry—a human cry—a cry for help?

The thought came back to her again and again. She was in sight of the pond, when she could stand it no longer, but pulled the mare about.

“Come, old girl! We’ve got to be sure of this,” cried Eve. “Back you go!”

Her mount cantered back again. They reached the edge of the swamp and Eve pulled the mare down to a walk. Stepping daintily, the steed followed the narrow path through the overbushes swamp. One could not see a dozen feet

on either hand, so tall were the bushes, and so thick—not even at the height Eve rode.

She halted her horse and called aloud:

“Ahoy! Hullo! Who called?”

No answer—for half a minute. The farmer’s daughter shouted again. Then she heard it again—a half-stifled cry—a cry that ended in a choking gasp and which chilled the blood in her veins and made her hold her own breath for a moment.

Was it an actual voice calling for help that had answered her? Or had she imagined the cry?

She held in the anxious horse, and waited. Again the muffled shriek reached her ears. Somebody was caught in the quagmire—in the quicksand. It was off to the left, and not many yards from the path.

CHAPTER XI

BOBBY IS INTERESTED

INDEED, one could not have ventured many feet from the path at this season of the year, when the heavy Spring rains had filled the swamp, without sinking into the mire. Eve knew this very well, and it was with fast-beating heart that she slipped from her horse, tied the bridle-rein to a sapling, and ventured cautiously in the direction of the half-choked cries.

"I'm coming! Where are you?" she called.

The cry for help came for a third time. Eve parted the bushes before her, and then shrank back. She had been about to put her foot upon a bit of shaking moss which, when she disturbed the branches of the bush, sank completely out of sight in the black mire.

Another step might have proved her own undoing!

But on the other side of this dimpling pool of mire a willow tree of the "weeping" variety stood with its roots deep in the swamp. And

clinging to a drooping branch of this tree were two sun-browned hands—muscular, but small.

“A woman!” gasped Eve. Then, the next moment, she added: “A girl!”

And a girl it was—a girl no older than herself. The victim was all but shoulder deep in the mire. She was clinging desperately to the branch of the tree. Her face was half hidden by the twigs and leaves, and by her own disarranged hair, which hung in black elf-locks about it.

But even in that moment of surprise and fear, Eve identified her. It was the girl who had been a fugitive from the Gypsy camp.

The identity of the person in peril did not claim Eve’s attention for half a moment, however. It was her necessity, and the fact that she must be rescued immediately that spurred the farm girl to action.

“Hold on! I’ll save you!” she shouted, and even as she spoke she saw the girl slip down a hand’s breadth deeper into the ooze. If she was to save the victim Eve must indeed work rapidly, and to the purpose.

She saw how the girl had come into her evil plight. Beside the tree ran a narrow strip of grassy hummock. It looked sound, but Eve well knew that all such places were treacherous.

The Gypsy girl had trusted to it, venturing off the regular and beaten path. She had slipped, or the edge of the hummock had caved in with her. Only by chance had she caught at the branch of the willow and so stayed her descent into the bottomless morass.

Fleet of foot, Eve sprang back to the bridle path where the mare was tied. She wanted the only thing which, in this emergency, could be of help to her—and to the girl sinking in the mire.

There was no time to go for help. There was no fence near where she could obtain rails, even. Nor did she have anything with which to cut down saplings to aid the girl.

Quickly her nimble fingers unbound the leather bridle from the tree. Then she unbuckled the reins and removed them entirely, letting the mare go free if she would. But the wise old horse stood and watched her, without offering to run away.

“That’s right! Stand still, old girl!” exclaimed Eve Sitz. “I’ll want you mighty bad in a minute, or too, perhaps.”

She sprang upon the tussock on which the victim of the accident had evidently been before her. But she was cautious. She came to the place where the poor girl clung to the tree

branch. Those twigs were slowly slipping through her cramped fingers. In a few seconds she would slip entirely from her hold. Already she was too far gone to speak, and her eyes were closed.

It was no use calling again. Eve bent forward and with a little prayer for help, cast the loop of the strong rein over the victim's head and shoulders.

As she did so the girl's hands slipped entirely from the tree-branch.

Eve screamed. But she threw herself back, too, as the weight of the sinking girl came upon the bridle rein. Eve easily held her up. She could sink no farther. But the question that troubled the farmer's daughter was: Could she draw the unconscious girl out of the mire?

But Eve was the heavier of the two, and far stronger. The Gypsy girl could run and leap like a hare—as she had proven the day the girls of Central High had seen her escaping from the encampment of her Romany companions. But she had not been strong enough to scramble out of the mud when she had once fallen into it.

Now Eve, sure that the bridle rein would hold, flung herself back and dragged the girl up. She came out upon the narrow tussock slowly, but surely.

Eve wrapped the lines about her wrists and tugged with all her weight and strength; and she was not many seconds in accomplishing the rescue.

The unfortunate girl lay helpless on the edge of the morass. She was a mass of mud, and her eyes were still closed. Eve seized her under the arms and dragged her across the trembling hummock to firmer ground. Once Eve herself stepped over the edge of the solid ground and plunged—knee-deep—into the mire.

But she recovered herself and quickly brought her burden, breathless though she herself was, to the bridle-path. The old gray mare looked upon the muddy figure on the ground with ears pricked forward. But Eve spoke softly to her, and the creature stood still, as though she knew her help was needed.

Eve did not trouble to put on the rein again. When she got her breath she raised the girl, who was still only half conscious, in her arms, and managed to get her on the horse.

“You’ve got to carry double; but you can go just as slow as you want to, old girl!” Eve exclaimed, as she leaped upon the mare herself, sitting behind the other girl, and holding her on.

Then she spoke again to the mare, and the latter picked her way carefully over the narrow

path and so to the North pasture. In fifteen minutes Eve had the strange girl at the farmhouse, where her kind-hearted mother helped put the visitor to bed. They were true Samaritans in that house. They reserved all questioning until after the needy had been aided.

Eve went to town that afternoon, for she was due for practice at the athletic field, full of this adventure. The strange girl had not said a word about herself save that she had been traveling through the marsh early that morning and had mistaken the path.

Eve had told her mother her suspicions as to who the girl was, and it was plain that the young Gypsy would be unfit for travel for some days. The Sitzes would try to find out something about her condition, and why she was striving to escape from her companions.

"But, it's plain why she left town so hurriedly," declared Jess Morse, one of those to whom Eve told her story. "I've seen those Gypsy women in town myself this week. I saw the queen—Grace Varey, did you say her name is?"

"That's the name she gave us last year," said Eve.

"Well, I saw her only this morning. The Gypsies have come to town to search for that

girl. She knows it and was escaping into the country when she got into that swamp. My! It was lucky you rode that way, Eve."

But it was Bobby Hargrew who showed the most interest in the affairs of the mysterious Gypsy girl. She asked Eve a hundred questions about her and finally admitted that she had reasons for wishing to know all about her that she did not feel free to divulge.

"I tell you honestly, Eve, I wish you'd let me go home with you so that I can see that girl before Monday morning," said Bobby, bluntly.

"Well, why not?" returned the farm girl, laughing. "You'd be welcome, Clara."

"I'll telephone father at the store and run home and pack a bag and meet you at the station," announced Bobby, greatly excited.

"Why, we'll be more than pleased," urged Eve. "I'd like to know what the matter is with that girl, too. If you find out, will you tell me?" and she laughed again.

"If it's only *my* secret I'll tell you in a minute," promised Bobby. But in her heart she believed that it would prove to be partly Miss Carrington's secret, and she could not speak of *her* affairs, that was sure.

CHAPTER XII

THE RACES

BOBBY, as she said, "fished" for this invitation and got it while the girls were dressing in the gym. building, before the try-out work on the field that Saturday afternoon. Eve went to her broad jump, while Bobby lined up with a lot of the would-be sprinters from all four classes, to try their speed from the fifty-yard dash up to the quarter-mile.

Only the very best of the candidates were allowed to try the longer races, and they had all to go to Dr. Agnew's office first. The doctor spent the most of every Saturday afternoon at the gym. building, and he doled out good advice to the girls while he prodded them, and listened to their heart and lung action, and otherwise discovered if they were "fit."

Laura had been delegated by Mrs. Case to watch the sprinters, and most of them were quickly sent to the courts to play tennis, or basketball, or some other game, and the cinder

track was soon devoted to those only who were earnestly endeavoring to develop their speed as runners—and who had some small chance, at least, to make a good record.

Bobby tried the first short dash, and then the third. There was some crowding on the track and she could not do her best—nor did she wish to. As long as she made a good enough showing to be advised to wait for the finals, she was content, and so was Laura.

“Hold yourself in,” advised Mother Wit, smiling on her. “If you spend your best wind trying to beat these others at first you’ll be lost when it comes to the quarter-mile, and be retired.”

So Bobby bided her time until the quarter-mile was called. There were but six contestants. It was the longest trial of speed that Mrs. Case would allow on the track. The Girls’ Branch Athletic League gave but a doubtful approval, at most, to the quarter-mile trial.

The six were “set” on the line and Laura, watch in hand, waited for the arrow to touch the mark, her hand raised.

“Go!” she shouted, and the girls sprang away, each doing her very best from the start. For the quarter-mile run leaves little space for jockeying. It is soon over, and the contestant

who gets off ahead is quite frequently the winner.

The six girls were not so unevenly matched; and they started well on a line. For the first few yards they kept together.

But then the pace began to tell. For fifty yards, say, they were matched to a degree; then it was plain that only two of them had the "sand" to keep up that killing pace for long.

Bobby and one other forged ahead. Breast to breast, their arms working in unison, their stride equal, the two girls passed ahead of the others and shot along the track with unabated swiftness.

The girls behind were panting, and falling back. One wavered and dropped out entirely when she had run but a furlong. The others clung to the track, however, doing their very best to record a fair time, at least. They had learned under Mrs. Case to play the game out, no matter how badly they seemed to be beaten.

Bobby and the girl with her felt the strain growing, however. Unless the runner is experienced, the dogged perseverance of a close opponent is likely to rattle one at the last moment. As the two came down the stretch and the watching girls began to cheer and "root" for their favorite contestant, the runners felt their nerve going.

A misstep now would cause the loss of the

race to one, or to the other. Bobby tried not to see the girls along the track, or to think of the one pounding away beside her.

She was breathing with comparative ease herself; but the sound of the other girl's breathing pumped in her ears, louder and louder! And how loudly her footbeats were, too!

Could she only get away from those sounds—leave them behind her—clear the rushing air about her of those noises!

There was the line stretched across the track. She knew it was there because Laura stood with it in her hand. If she could only breast that ribbon first!

Somewhere—it seemed to be a cry from the air right over her head—a shrill voice kept repeating:

“Come on! Come on, Bobs!”

And Bobby called up that reserve strength that Mrs. Case had talked so much about in her little lectures to the girls, and sprang ahead of her rival. She was unconscious of the fact that she was ahead. It seemed to her that the other girl was still clinging to her. She could hear the footsteps and the heavy breathing.

But suddenly she was aware that it was her own feet spurning the cinders that she heard—and her own breathing. She was winning!

And then the tape snapped across her chest and Jess and Eve Sitz, who had run over to watch the finish of the race, caught her in their arms.

"Splendid! Bully for you, Bobs!" cried Jess. "Why, there isn't any other quarter-mile runner in Central High. You take the palm!"

And not until then did Bob understand that the girl she thought she had run so closely was a hallucination. The second runner was yards behind her at the finish!

They bore Bobby into the gym. building and Mrs. Case insisted upon Dr. Agnew's seeing her again almost immediately. The physician was still in the building, and he came when called. The physical instructor was examining the time card Laura and her assistants had made out. She would not divulge their time to the runners, and the time keepers were sworn to secrecy; but everybody knew that Bobby Hargrew had made a good showing.

"There's nothing the matter with that little girl," said the doctor, confidently. "Only, these sudden strains are not valuable. Yes, once, by the way, is all right. As long as one does not go beyond that reserve strength that your instructor harps upon," and he laughed.

Bobby was naturally proud over her achieve-

ment, for she knew that she had run a very fast quarter. She was only sorry that she could not know herself just how fast she was. But that was a secret Mrs. Case kept from her.

"The worst possible thing for a runner in training to know is how fast, or how slow, he is," she often declared. "Do your best each time; that is your business."

So Bobby got into her street clothes and, having telephoned to her father as she had promised Eve Sitz, she ran home to pack her bag. On the way she passed by the house where Miss Carrington boarded. Gee Gee had two rooms in a wing of the old Boyce house, in which the Widow Boyce kept lodgers. Her front room had long, French windows which swung outward like doors upon the porch. And as Bobby ran by she saw a man come down from this porch, as though he had been listening at the windows. and hurry around the corner of the house and behind the thick hedge of the kitchen garden.

"That was the Gypsy—Jim Varey," Bobby thought, hesitating before the house. "What is he haunting Gee Gee for? Ought she to know that he is hanging around?"

But the girl hesitated about going in and speaking to the teacher. Gee Gee, she consid-

ered, was really her arch-enemy. Why should she try to shield her from any trouble? And, too, Miss Carrington might not thank her for interfering in her private affairs.

So Bobby ran on home and told Mrs. Ballister where she was going, huddled a few things into her bag, kissed "the kids," as she termed her sisters, and ran off for the station, there to meet Eve for the 5:14 train to Keyport.

And while she waited who should appear but that black-faced man with the gold hoops in his ears—Jim Varey!

The Gypsy saw her—Bobby knew he did. But he paid her no attention, slinking into the men's room and not appearing again until Eve arrived and the two girls went aboard the train. Then Bobby saw him once more.

"Do you see that fellow, Eve?" she demanded, whispering into the bigger girl's ear.

"What fellow?"

"There! he's gone," said Bobby, with a sigh. "I feared he was following us."

"Whom do you mean?" queried Eve, rather surprised by her manner.

"Jim Varey, the Gypsy."

"Why! is he about?" asked Eve. "You mean the husband of Queen Grace? Well, he's a bad egg, he is! I hope he won't dog us to

the house, for he might learn then where that poor girl is hiding."

When they were in the car Bobby stuck her head out of the window to look along the platform. She did not see Jim Varey in the crowd; but she might better have kept in her head—for he saw her.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT MARGIT SAID

THE two girls settled back into their seats, each having one to herself, for the car was not filled. Bobby was soon laughing and joking in her usual way.

"If I ride backward like this, will I get to the same place you do, Eve?" she asked.

"What a ridiculous question!" exclaimed Eve.

"I don't know. One of the 'squabs' was going around yesterday asking everybody a much more foolish one."

"What was that?"

"Why, what was the largest island in the world before Australia was discovered?" queried Bobby, giggling.

"Why—why—Newfoundland, perhaps?"

"Nope."

"Madagascar?"

"No," said Bobby, shaking her head.

"England and Scotland together?"

"Huh! You couldn't divide them very well," jeered Bobby. "But that's not the answer."

"What *was* the biggest island, then? I give it up," said Eve.

"Why, Australia, of course," chuckled Bobby. "It was there all the time, even if it wasn't discovered. Don't you see?"

And so she passed the time without betraying the fact that she had a very serious reason for wishing to see and talk with Margit Salgo.

When the girls left the train they had no idea that Jim Varey got out of the smoking car on the wrong side from the station and hid in the bushes. When the girls started across the fields toward the Sitz place, the Gypsy dogged them.

In half an hour Eve and her guest reached the house, never suspecting that they had been the subject of attention.

Bobby was welcome at the farmhouse. She had been there several times before and from Farmer Sitz down they enjoyed the whimsical, irrepressible girl. The expectation that she would be "good fun" put Bobby on her mettle, despite the fact that, secretly, she did not feel cheerful.

Margit Salgo was better and seemed content enough to occupy the comfortable bed in the room next Eve's own. She knew Bobby imme-

diately, and looked a bit disturbed. But Bobby gave her to understand that she had told nobody about what the Gypsy girl had said the day they were caught together in the rain.

"But to-night, when the other folks are abed, I want you to tell Eve and me what you care to about yourself, Margit," said Bobby, when the others were out of the room. "Perhaps we can help you. All we girls are interested in you, for, you see, at least seven of us saw you that day when you ran away from your friends."

"No friends of mine! no friends of mine!" gasped the girl, half in fear.

"All right. You tell us all about it this evening," whispered Bobby and then whisked out to help Eve with her duties.

Not that she was of much help when she followed Eve out to the clean and modern barn where Eve had her own six cows to milk, while Otto or the hired man milked the rest of the herd. But she *was* amusing.

"Goodness me!" was Bobby's first comment, when she came into the shed and saw the row of mild-eyed cattle standing in their stalls. "What a lot of cows—and every one of them chewing gum! Can you beat it?"

"What do you suppose Miss Carrington would say to a row of girls who chewed their

cud as seriously as these bossies?" laughed Eve.

Bobby arched her brows, screwed up her mouth, and replied, in a stilted manner:

"'Young ladies! I *am* surprised. Do my eyes deceive me? Do you consider it polite to wag your jaws like that in public? Fie, for shame!' And much more to the same purpose," added Bobby, laughing. "Oh, Gee Gee and her lessons in politeness make me tired. She's so polite herself that she'd even return a telephone call! Hullo! what's this?"

"A bridle," said Eve, as Bobby took it down from its hook.

"Oh! Sure! You see, I'm a regular green-horn when it comes to country things. Of course, that's the bit. But say! how do you ever get it into the horse's mouth? *I'd* have to wait for him to yawn, I expect," and she laughed.

She was great fun at supper, too, to the delight of the family. Otto, with his queer notions of the English language, made Bobby very gay; and the young man complained of his difficulties with the English language just for the sake of encouraging Bobby to correct his speech. Finally she made up one of her little doggerel verses for him, to Otto's great delight:

“Otto saw a sausage in a pan,
He smelled a smelt a-frying;
He saw the sheep that had been dyed
Look not the least like dying.

“He saw a hen sit on an egg,
Although she had been set;
Heard Eve complain of being dry
Though plainly she was wet.

“He looked upon the window pane,
Quite sure no pain it had;
Then sighed, and shook his head, and said:
‘Dot English, she iss pad!’”

Good Mrs. Sitz had not allowed Margit to get out of bed, but Eve and Bobby took supper in to the Gypsy girl on a tray. She protested that she was not an invalid, and after Otto and the old folks had gone to bed, Margit, well wrapped in shawls and a comforter, came out to sit in a big chair before Eve's fire.

“I am not like you girls,” she said, wistfully. “You go to school and learn things out of books, eh? Well, I never went to school. And then, this big America is so different from my country. You do not understand.”

“I guess *I* can understand something of what you mean,” observed Eve, soberly. “You see, *we* came from Europe, too.”

“Not from Hungary—Austria-Hungary?” cried Margit Salgo, with excitement.

“No, no. From Switzerland,” replied Eve,

smiling. "And I was very small when we came, so I do not remember much about it."

"But I came only last year," explained Margit. "And I was given to the Vareys——"

"Goodness me! Don't talk that way," interrupted Bobby. "It sounds just as though you were *owned* by those Gypsies."

"Well, it is so," said Margit. "I am a Gypsy, too. My father was Belas Salgo. He was a musician—a wonderful musician, I believe. But he was a Gypsy. And all the Romans are kin, in some way. These Vareys are English Gypsies. They are kind enough to me. But I sure believe they hide from me *who I am*."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Eve, in surprise, although Bobby said not a word, but listened, eagerly.

"Only my father, you see, was a Gypsy. My mother——"

"Who was she?" asked Bobby, suddenly.

"I—I do not know. But she was not of those people—no. I am sure of that. She died when I was very little. I went about in many lands with my father. Then he died—very suddenly. Gypsy friends took me for a while, but they all said I belonged over here—in America. So they sent me here finally."

"Your mother was American, then, perhaps?" said Eve, shrewdly.

"That may be it. But these Vareys care nothing about my finding any relatives, save for one thing," said Margit, shaking her head, gloomily.

"What is that?" asked Bobby.

"If there is money. They believe my mother's people might be rich, or something of the kind. Then they would make them pay to get hold of me. But suppose my mother's people do not want me?" slowly added the fugitive, sadly.

"You are quite sure this is the idea the Vareys have?" asked Bobby.

"Oh, yes. I heard them talking. Then I saw a—a card with a name written on it. They said, when they were looking at the card, '*She* will know all about it. It is to her we must go.' So I know it was a woman's name."

"But how did you know—or suspect—that the name was that of any teacher in our school?" demanded Bobby, much to Eve's surprise.

"Ah! I learned much—here a word, there a word—by listening. I knew we were coming to Centerport for the purpose of getting speech with this woman whose name had been given

them by the Hungarian people who brought me over here to America."

"But mercy on us!" cried Eve, in vast amazement. "What name is it?"

"She can't explain, for she cannot pronounce it," said Bobby, instantly.

"Grace, or Jim Varey, never spoke the name aloud," said Margit, shaking her head. "But I know there are eighteen letters in the name. I counted them."

"And what teacher at Central High has eighteen letters in her name?" murmured Eve, staring at Bobby.

Bobby took a pencil and wrote Miss Carrington's full name slowly on a piece of paper. She put it before the Gypsy girl.

"Is *that* the name?" she asked. "When we spoke together before I had forgotten that Miss Carrington always spells her middle name out in full when she writes it at all."

"'Miss Carrington!' gasped Eve, and, like Bobby, looked in the Gypsy girl's face questioningly.

CHAPTER XIV

ANOTHER FLITTING

"Is she nice?" asked Margit Salgo, eagerly, looking at the two Central High girls.

"Bless us!" muttered Bobby.

"She is a very well educated lady," said Eve, seriously. "I cannot tell whether you would like her. But—but do you really believe that she knows anything about you, Margit?"

"I do not know how much she knows of *me*," said the Gypsy girl, quickly. "But of my mother's people she knows. That I am sure. She—she holds the key, you would say, to the matter. It is through her, I am sure, that the Vareys expect to get money for me."

"To sell you to Miss Carrington?" gasped Eve.

"I do not know," replied the Gypsy girl, shaking her head. "But there is money to be made out of me, I know. And Queen Grace is—is very eager to get money."

"She's avaricious, is she?" said Eve, thoughtfully.

But Bobby Hargrew's mind was fixed upon another phase of the subject. She took Margit's hand and asked, softly:

"What was your mother's name, dear?"

"Why—Madam Salgo."

"But her first name—her intimate name? What did your father call her? Do you not remember?"

Margit waited a moment and then nodded. "I understand," she said. "It was 'Annake.'"

"Anne?"

"Ah, yes—in your harsh English tongue," returned Margit. "But why do you ask?"

Bobby was not willing to tell her that—then.

"At any rate, Margit," Eve told her, soothingly, "you will stay here with us just as long as you like." The girl had narrated her flight from Centerport when she saw the Gypsies in that town and knew they would hunt her down. "And we girls will help you find your friends."

"This Miss Carrington," spoke Margit, eagerly. "She knows. I must meet her. But do you not tell her anything about me. Let me meet and judge her for myself."

"Don't you think we'd better tell her something about you?" asked Eve, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps she might not want to know me," replied the Gypsy girl, anxiously. "Who am I? A Romany! All you other people look down on the Romany folk."

"Well, you are only part Gypsy," said the practical Evangeline. "And your father was an educated man—a great musician, you say."

"Surely!"

"Then I wouldn't class myself with people who would chase me with a bloodhound, and only wanted to make money out of me," said Eve, sensibly.

"Ah! but all the Romany folk are not like the Vareys," returned Margit.

Eve would not allow the girl to talk until late, for her experience in the swamp had been most exhausting. They bundled her into bed, and laid all her poor clothing—which Mrs. Sitz had washed and ironed with her own hands—on the chair beside her.

Bobby had one more question to ask the Gypsy girl before she went to sleep, and she asked that in secret.

"How did that Varey woman—that Gypsy queen—know so much about me, and about Laura Belding, and our affairs?"

"Did she?" returned Margit, sleepily. "She is a sharp one! But, then, the Vareys have

worked through this part of the country for years and years. That is why I was given to them, I think. Perhaps Grace Varey has been to Centerport many times—I do not know. We Romany folk pick up all sorts of information—yes!”

Bobby stole into bed beside Eve. She could not sleep for some time; but finally her eyes closed and—for some hours, or some minutes, she never knew which—she slept. Then, a dog’s howling broke her rest.

Bobby sat up and listened. The dog’s mournful howling sounded nearer. Some dog about the Sitz premises answered with several savage barks. But, as nothing followed, the city girl dropped back upon her pillows again.

The night noises of the country, however, disturbed her. She could not sleep soundly. Once she thought she heard voices—and so clearly that it seemed as though they must be in the bedroom.

But it was still dark. Nobody could be astir, she told herself, at such a dark hour. A rooster crowed, and then several others followed. She fell asleep again slowly counting the chanticleers.

And then—suddenly, it seemed—Eve was shaking her and calling in her ear:

"Oh, Bobby! Bobby! Wake up—do! What do you suppose has happened?"

It was broad daylight. Eve was more than half dressed and the door between their room and that occupied by the Gypsy girl was open.

"What's the matter?" gasped Bobby.

"She's gone!" wailed Eve.

"Who's gone?" and Bobby leaped out of bed.

"That girl. Out of the window. She's run away!"

Bobby ran to look into the room. The window sash was up and the blinds wide open. The girls had slept on the ground floor, and alone in this wing of the rambling old farmhouse.

"What did she run away for?" demanded Bobby, slowly. "She could have *walked* away, had she wanted to, couldn't she? Nobody would have stopped her."

"But she's gone!" cried Eve.

"So I see," Bobby admitted, grimly. "She didn't go of her own free will, you can just bet!"

"I didn't think of that," cried Eve, running to the window.

It was a beautiful Sunday morning, and even farmer folk remain an hour longer in bed on

that day. The sun, which had just risen, revealed the hillside fields and pastures clearly. There was not an object in sight which suggested the missing girl's escape, saving just beneath the window. There several planks had been laid upon the soft earth, to make a walk to the hard path. This had been done by those who had come after Margit Salgo, so as to leave no footprints.

Eve finished dressing in a hurry and ran to tell her parents and Otto. Mr. and Mrs. Sitz slept at the other end of the house, and Otto and the hired man on the floor above.

Whoever had kidnapped the girl—for such it seemed to be—had worked very circumspectly. The watchdog, chained by his hutch, had been caught and a strong rubber band fastened about his jaws so that he could not bark. This had evidently been the first work of the marauders.

Then they had gone about taking out the girl coolly enough. There were few footprints anywhere. And in the roadway they found where a wagon had been turned around. In this wagon, it was likely, Margit had been carried away, and it had started along the road in the direction of Centerport.

"They have got her again," sighed Bobby.
"And goodness only knows what they will do

with her, or where they will hide her away."

"Perhaps we will never see the poor girl again," ventured Eve.

But Bobby did not believe that. She knew now, for sure, that Margit Salgo was in some manner closely connected with the private affairs of Miss Carrington. She was sure that both the Gypsies and Margit would appear near the high school again.

CHAPTER XV

ANOTHER RIVALRY ON THE FIELD

EVE SITZ had no rival at Central High when it came to putting the shot; but there were plenty of girls who essayed the broad jump—and some did almost if not quite as well as Eve. Notably Lou Potter, a senior who practiced assiduously and who had many friends who believed she would, in the end, best the Swiss girl.

"The meet is a long way off yet," said one of Lou's friends to Laura Belding. "That girl you juniors are boosting isn't the only 'hope' of Central High."

"Whom do you mean?" returned Mother Wit.

"That girl whose name sounds like a glass of vichy—what is it? Eve——"

"And what about Eve Sitz?" demanded Bobby, who chanced to arrive in time to hear the senior's remark.

"And here's another fresh one," said the

senior, eyeing Bobby coolly. "Thinks she is going to grab off the quarter-mile."

"You make me tired!" returned Bobby, promptly. "Is that what you call loyalty to the school? If you've got another girl faster than I am, trot her out. I won't stand in her light."

"Nor will Eve interfere with any girl who can beat her in jumping, or put the shot farther," declared Laura, quickly.

"Oh, yes! That's all very pretty talk. But Mrs. Case is favoring you. She is favoring the whole junior class. *We* weren't doing all the athletic stunts last year when we were juniors—no, indeed!"

"Well, whose fault is it if the junior class stands better in after-hour athletics than the senior?" demanded Bobby, laughing.

"And you pushed yourselves into the basketball team even before you were juniors," declared the other girl, angrily.

"Come, now!" returned Laura, warmly. "That's not fair at all. If any of you seniors had shown any desire to play the game to win, Mrs. Case would have put you on the first team—you know that. But your class, as a whole, would rather dance, and go to parties, and attend the theatre, and all that. You know very well that Mrs. Case has often called our atten-

tion to the fact that late hours takes the vitality out of us, and makes success in the gym. and on the field impossible."

"Thanks for your lecture, Mother Witless!" snapped the other girl. "But I don't care for it. And let me tell you that Lou Potter is going to make your soda-water champion look cheap."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Bobby, as the older girl turned away. "Do you suppose we'll be as high and mighty as all that when we get to be seniors, Laura?"

"I hope not—not even if we get to be patriarchs," laughed Mother Wit. "But Miss Potter is making a good jump, just the same, Bobby. Eve isn't going to have it all her own way."

"Why, Eve'll beat her easily," declared Bobby, with confidence.

Eve Sitz did not find it so easy to score ahead of all her rivals, however. And Lou Potter's record steadily grew better. Eve knew that she was doing her very best right along, whereas the senior was creeping up, creeping up—showing almost as good a record as Eve, and still forging on.

Magdeline Spink, of Lumberport, held the championship for putting the shot, and Eve knew that she had surpassed her score. In the broad jump it was almost as difficult for the

contestants to learn their exact record as it was for the sprinters to learn theirs. If Mrs. Case measured the distance she kept the record secret.

Some of the seniors, especially those who were backing Lou Potter, began to make trouble in the meetings of the athletic committee, too. Heretofore no point had been made of the fact that the after-hour athletics were dominated by the junior class of Central High. That it was the fault of the present class of seniors if they were not in control of the League, did not now appeal to the disaffected.

Some of the junior and sophomore girls who, as Bobby said, were inclined to "toady" to members of the first class, took up cudgels for the seniors, too. Notably Lily Pendleton, who was forever aping the manners of her elders and always liked to associate with more mature girls.

And so, when there was friction in the committee meetings, Lily usually sided with the senior members.

"Why don't you stick by your classmates, Lil?" demanded the hot-tempered Bobby, one afternoon, when the committee had been discussing plans for the June meet. It had already been decided that the inter-school field day exercises should be held on the grounds of

Central High, that being by far the best field.

"Have I got to stick by you whether you're right, or not, Bob Hargrew?" demanded Lily.

"But we're right—of course."

"I don't think so. The seniors should have their say. We'll want to boss when *we* are seniors."

"They haven't shown much interest in the scoring of Central High in athletic matters until lately," Jess Morse said, quickly. "Why should they want to come in now and run it all?"

"They have the right," declared Lily.

"Don't see it—do you, Laura?" cried Bobby.

"If they only wouldn't try to go against Mrs. Case's wishes so frequently," sighed Mother Wit, who would have conceded much for peace.

"They don't propose to be bossed by the teachers all the time," declared Lily. "And they're right."

Now, this attitude would have appealed to Bobby Hargrew a few months before. But she had learned a good bit of late.

"There is no use in our trying to run athletics in opposition to Mrs. Case—or Mr. Sharp," she said.

"Or Gee Gee; eh, Bobby?" added Hester Grimes, slyly.

As the girls crowded out of the committee room some of the boys were grouped at the corridor's end, plainly waiting for their appearance. Chet Belding and Launcelot Darby, his chum, were waiting for Laura and Jess. That was a frequent occurrence. No boy ever waited for the fly-away Bobby; but there was with the two chums a tall, thin youth dressed in the most astonishing clothes that ever appeared in the corridors of a high school.

"Oh me, oh my!" cried Bobby, under her breath. "There's Purt Sweet—and he looks like a negro minstrel."

"My goodness me! He is dressed to kill, isn't he?" giggled Jess.

For Prettyman Sweet, the sartorial example of Central High, was more than usually gay upon this occasion. And he was not waiting there by chance, it was plain.

"See! Lily is trotting off with him," laughed Bobby. "They must have patched up a truce. Oh! and look at that collar!" and the wicked Bobby leaned far over the banister and sang gaily:

"He wore a collar extra high,
He wore a purple vest;
He wore his father's patience out—
But why tell all the rest?"

"That saucy child!" exclaimed Lily, looking back. "She ought to be whipped."

"You never can get even with her, doncher know," drawled Purt, shaking his head. "Weally, I'd much like to try it; but I don't know what to do."

"And the rest of those girls, laughing, too," snapped Lily. "Jess Morse and Laura are just as bad."

"Well, weally——"

"Oh, if you had half the pluck of a rabbit," scolded Lily, "you'd do something to get square."

Now, Lil Pendleton wronged Pretty Sweet. He was not particularly brave, it was true; but he would have done a good deal to "get even" with Bobby Hargrew for her sharp tongue. He had been the butt of her jokes for a long time and—— Well, it is said even the worm will turn.

The following afternoon a sudden thunder shower kept some of the girls in the school building after most of the pupils had departed. It was a part of the junior class, and Bobby, as well as Laura and Jess, were among those kept by Miss Carrington after the regular session closed.

"I believe she knew we were due at the ath-

letic field this afternoon," grumbled Bobby, as they stood waiting at the foot of the tower stairs for the shower to pass.

"What good would it have done us to be at the gym. now?" laughed Laura. "This shower has spoiled open air work for the afternoon."

"Bobby doesn't believe Gee Gee ever gives us extra tasks because we deserve them," said Jess.

"It *did* seem as though Miss Carrington was particularly harsh to-day," murmured Eve.

"That's so! She was as cross as two sticks," declared Bobby.

"I believe something is troubling Miss Carrington's mind," said Nellie Agnew. "Have you noticed how thin she is getting—and that she starts nervously at every little thing?"

"She was scared when the thunder began—I was glad of it," declared Bobby.

"Bad girl!" admonished Laura.

"It's her conscience," ventured Bobby.

Eve looked at her and shook her head.

"Oh, I'm not going to say *why* I think her conscience troubles her," laughed Bobby.

Nellie was looking out of the window. "I say, girls! it's breaking away, I do believe. And I think there's a rainbow—yes! there's a part of it."

"It is a very small part you see, Nell," laughed Eve.

"Let's go up into the tower," suggested Jess. "We can see it all from there."

"Let's," agreed Bobby.

"That's forbidden, you know," said Laura, slowly.

"Oh, dear, Laura! Don't be such a molly-coddle! Nobody's really told us girls not to go into the tower. And we won't do any damage——"

"Maybe the door is locked," observed Nellie, doubtfully.

But Bobby ran to the solid oak door and tried it. Although there was a key in the lock, the door opened at once to her turning of the knob.

"Come on!" exclaimed Bobby. "You're a lot of scare-cats!"

"I admire your language, Bobs," laughed Jess, following her.

The others went, too. Of course it was forbidden territory, and why shouldn't they want to go? That was only human nature.

Besides, as they climbed the stairs, through the narrow windows they caught glimpses of the rainbow and the clouds, now breaking up into great beds of vari-colored mist.

“Hurry up!” cried Bobby, in the lead. “It’s just wonderful up here.”

They had left the door at the foot of the long, winding flight open. But scarcely had they disappeared when another figure appeared in the corridor which they had left. Purt Sweet, too, had been kept after school by Professor Dimp.

The youth saw the girls ascend the stair. The chance was too obvious to neglect. Although usually taking Bobby’s jokes and the others’ laughter good-naturedly, he had been spurred by Lily Pendleton’s remarks to a desire to “get square.”

And here was opportunity before him. Purt hurried forward, softly closed the door behind the girls, and turned the key in the lock.

CHAPTER XVI

FIVE IN A TOWER

BUT the girls climbing the stairs to see the rainbow had no idea that anybody below was playing a trick on them. After school was dismissed and the pupils left the building, and the teachers were gone, there was nobody but old John, the janitor, on the premises.

From any other floor he could be summoned by alarm bells. But there were no push-buttons in the tower. Therefore, when Purl Sweet turned the key, and stole away from the door at the bottom of the tower stairs, he had imprisoned the five girls as effectually as though they were in the tower of some ancient castle.

The five went up the stairs, however, without any suspicion that they were prisoners.

"Come on! come on!" urged Bobby, who mounted much quicker than the others. "Oh, this is glorious!"

They came out into a square room, through which the air blew freshly. The rain had evidently blown into the place during the shower,

for it lay in puddles on the stone floor. The windows had no panes—indeed, they were merely narrow slits in the stone wall, like loopholes in old fortresses.

“Dear me!” cried Jess. “How small the people look in the park—do you see? Just like ants.”

“Some of ’em are uncles, not ‘ants,’” laughed Bobby.

“Punning again!” exclaimed Nell. “You should be punished for that, Bobby.”

“Huh! that’s worse than mine,” declared Bobby.

“Look at that sky!” cried Laura.

“It is very beautiful,” agreed Eve, quietly.

“Look at those clouds yonder—a great, pink bed of down!” murmured Jess.

“And this arch of color,” said Laura, seriously. “I suppose that is just what Noah saw. How poetic to call it the Bow of Promise!”

The girls enjoyed looking at the wild colorings of the clouds and the beautiful bow. A half an hour elapsed before they proposed descending.

As they went down the stairs, Bobby still in the lead, she stopped suddenly with a little cry.

“What’s the matter now, Bobs?” demanded Jess.

"Oh! don't you see it?" cried the other girl.
"It's a spider."

"He won't eat you," said Jess. "Go on."

"I know he won't. I declare! he's spinning a web."

At that moment she came to the bottom of the stairway.

"Guess the draught pulled the door shut," she exclaimed. "Hullo!"

She tried the knob, but the door would not open.

"Why, what's the matter, Bobby?" cried Laura. "That is not a spring lock."

"Huh! I guess not," returend Bobby. "But somebody's sprung it on us, just the same."

"What do you mean?" demanded Nellie Agnew.

"The door's locked," declared Laura, reaching the bottom step and trying the knob herself.

"You bet it is," said Bobby.

"It's a joke!" gasped Eve.

"I should hope so," returned Laura. "If they were in earnest it would be bad for us. John will leave the building soon, and how will we attract anybody to release us?"

"Oh, Laura!" cried Nell. "Nobody would be so mean."

"It may be," said Eve, thoughtfully, "that

somebody went past, saw the door open, and closed and locked it with no idea that we were in the tower."

"Well!" exclaimed Bobby, at that. "We're in a nice fix—yes?"

"Who would have done it?" wailed Nellie Agnew.

"Maybe the janitor himself," observed Laura, thoughtfully.

"My goodness! but you're the cheerful girl," returned Bobby. "Do you want to scare us to death right at the start, Mother Wit?"

"We might as well admit the seriousness of the situation," said Laura. "I can't imagine that anybody would shut us up here for a joke."

"Some of the boys?" suggested Eve.

"That Short and Long is full of mischief," added Nell.

"Chet would wring his neck for a thing like this," declared Jess, with confidence.

"I don't care who did it, or what it was done for," said Bobby, finally. "The fact remains: The door is locked!"

"That is the truest thing you ever said, Bobby," sighed Jess. "Come on back to the tower room. Do you suppose we can call loud enough to attract the attention of people on the street?"

"Not in a thousand years," groaned Bobby.

"Oh, we won't have to remain here that long," said Laura, cheerfully.

"Hope not," growled Bobby. "I'm getting hungry."

"That won't do you any good," said Jess. "It's useless to have an appetite when there is nothing in sight to satisfy it—just as useless as the holes in a porous plaster."

"Who says the holes in a porous plaster are useless?" demanded Bobby, quickly. "They're not."

"What are they for, then?" asked Eve, mildly.

"Why, to let the pain out, of course," declared Bobby, boldly.

"I wish there were some holes here that would let *us* out," sighed Nellie Agnew.

"Don't lose heart, Nell!" advised Laura. "There never was a situation that didn't offer some release. We'll find a way of escape."

"Sure!" scoffed Bobby. "Any of us can crawl out through one of these slits in the wall."

"And then what?" demanded Jess.

"Why, jump!" cried Bobby. "There'll be nothing to stop you."

"Don't talk so recklessly," said Mother Wit.

"This is really a very serious problem. Mother

will be very anxious about me if I don't come home by six."

"It's an hour and a half to that yet," said Nellie, looking at her watch.

Bobby was striving to squeeze through one of the open windows in the tower and look down upon the street. But it was nonsense to expect anybody on the walk to see them up there in the tower.

"And we could shriek our heads off without attracting a bit of attention," declared Nellie, half crying. "What *shall* we do, Laura?"

"Keep cool," advised Laura. "Why lose all our courage because we are locked into this tower? We will be found."

"Maybe," spoke Bobby, gloomily.

"You have become a regular croaker," declared Jess. "I'm ashamed of you, Bobs."

"That's all right!" cried Bobby. "But hunger is an awful thing to suffer."

"Ha! you make me laugh," cried Eve. "Just think of me! If I don't catch that 5:14 train I'll not get supper till nine o'clock."

"But what a supper it will be when you *do* get it!" exclaimed Bobby. "Oh, girls! when I was at Eve's house last week they had thirteen vegetables for supper, besides two kinds of cold meat, and preserves and pickles. Talk about

the poor farmer! Why the sort of supper Eve's folks have every night would cost city folks two dollars a plate."

"I am afraid you are stretching your imagination, Bobby," laughed Eve.

"Never! They've got bins and bins of vegetables—and rows and rows of ham in the meat house—and bar'ls and bar'ls of salt pork! Listen here," cried the whimsical Bobby, who had a doggerel rhyme for every occasion. "This is just what Eve Sitz hears whenever she goes down into the cellar in the winter. She can't deny it!" And she sang:

"Potato gazed with frightened eyes,
King corn lent mournful ear,
The beet a blushing red did turn,
The celery blanched with fear,
The bean hid trembling in its pod,
The trees began to bark,
And on the beaten turnpike road
The stones for warmth did spark,
The brooklet babbled in its sleep,
Because the night was cold;
The onion weeps within its bed
Because the year is old."

"You are so ridiculous," said Eve. "Nobody believes the rigamaroles you say."

"All right!" returned Bobby, highly offended. "But you're bound to believe one thing—that's sure."

"What is that?" queried Nellie.

"That we're up in this tower, with the door locked—and I believe that John, the janitor, goes home about this time to supper!"

"Oh, oh!" cried Nellie. "Don't say *that*. However will we get away?"

"Let's bang on the door!" exclaimed Jess.

So they thumped upon the thick oak door—Bobby even kicked it viciously; and they shouted until they were hoarse. But nobody heard, and nobody came. The only person who knew they were locked into the tower was a mile away from Central High by that time—and, anyway, he dared not tell of what he had done, nor did he dare go back to release the girls from their imprisonment.

CHAPTER XVII

EVE TAKES A RISK

"Now, Nell!" declared Mother Wit, emphatically, "there isn't the least use in your crying. Tears will not get us down from this tower."

"You—you can be just as—as brave as you want to be," sobbed Nellie Agnew. "I—want—to—go—home!"

"For goodness-gracious sake! Who doesn't?" snapped Bobby. "But, just as Laura says, weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth won't help us the tiniest bit!"

"What will help us, I'd like to know?" grumbled Jess Morse.

"Put on your thinking cap, Mother Wit," cried Bobby.

"Dear me!" said Eve, drawing in her head. "It is a long way from the ground—and that's a fact."

"It's a good, long jump," chuckled Bobby.

"Let's write calls for help on pieces of paper and drop them down," suggested Laura.

"With the wind blowing the way it is, the papers would fly up, instead of down," scoffed her chum.

"We'll weight 'em," said Laura.

"It would be like throwing over a bottle into the sea, telling how we are cast away on a desert island," said Bobby. "And this is worse than any desert island I ever heard about. Say, girls! how do you suppose our boots will taste?"

"What nonsense!" said Nellie, wiping her eyes. "We sha'n't be hungry enough to begin on our shoes for a long time yet. But how scared our folks will be when we don't come home to supper."

"And the sun's going down," mourned Jess.

"Why, girls," said Laura, thoughtfully, "it will be after dark before our folks begin to miss us much. And then they won't see us up here, that's sure!"

"I'm going to climb out of one of these windows and wave something," cried her chum. "Surely somebody will see me."

"And think you're just playing up here," commented Nellie, who was fast losing all hope.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Jess. "They must think, then, that I have selected a crazy

place to play in," and she removed her jacket and began to crawl out through one of the windows of the tower.

"Be careful, dear!" warned Laura.

"Yes, do look out where you step," said Bobby, grabbing Jess's skirt with a firm grip. "It's a long way down to the street."

"If we only had some means of making a light up here," said Laura, in a worried tone. "Then, after dark, people *would* be attracted by our plight."

"I haven't a match—have you?" demanded Bobby.

"Of course not. Girls never do carry useful things in their pockets. Unless *you* do, Bobby."

"I've got about everything in my pocket but a match," declared the smaller girl.

"I have a good mind to drop this old coat," called Jess, from outside.

"And it would catch on something half way down the tower, perhaps, and then you'd never see it again," Bobby said.

"Well, what *shall* we do?" demanded Jess, wriggling back into the tower-room and dragging her jacket after her. "Nobody will even look up. I expect we'd look like pigeons up here to them."

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bobby. "I do wish

some pigeons *would* fly up here. They do sometimes, you know."

"What good would they do us?" demanded Nellie.

"Couldn't we kill and eat them?" replied Bobby. "Nothing like having bright ideas when you are cast away on a desert tower."

"Your ideas may be bright enough," laughed Laura; "but I wouldn't care to eat pigeons raw."

"You may be glad to before we get down from here," returned Bobby, gloomily.

"Now that's ridiculous," said Mother Wit, briskly. "Don't *you* begin to lose heart, Miss Hargrew."

"I've as good a right as the next one," growled Bobby.

"Speaking of pigeons," observed Jess, ruminatively, "Chet's carriers sometimes come up here when he lets them out. I've seen them."

"My goodness me!" ejaculated Mother Wit. "Wouldn't that be fine?"

"Wouldn't what be fine?" queried Nellie, wiping her eyes.

"If some of Chet's carriers would just fly up here. They know me. I've handled them lots of times. And we might send a note back telling Chet where we are."

"And he'd find it tied under the pigeon's wing in about a week," scoffed Bobby.

"What *are* we going to do, girls?" demanded Nellie. "And it's chilly up here, too."

Jess pulled on her jacket again. "We can go down on the stairway, where it is warmer," she said.

"It is very annoying," wailed the doctor's daughter, "to have you girls take the matter so calmly. Why, the whole town will be searching for us by midnight."

"I hope so!" ejaculated Bobby.

"Let's all shout together. Somebody ought to hear us," Eve said.

"That is impossible," objected Jess. "Sound doesn't travel downward—much. Not when there is a sharp wind blowing, as it is now. It's a good deal farther to the ground than it appears."

"That's like what our old girl, Nora, said about the distance to Liverpool. When she came to us, she came direct from the immigrant ship," laughed Bobby. "And she was telling about the weary way across the 'say.' 'How far is it, Nora?' one of the children asked her.

"'It's fower thousan' mile,' declared Nora, 'to Liverpool.'

"But the kiddies wouldn't have that. They

looked it up in the geography, and told her she was wrong—it was only three thousand.

“ ‘Sure, that’s flatways,’ says Nora. ‘But I been over it, an’ wid the ups an’ the downs, sure I *know* ’tis another thousand!’ ”

“Dear me, Bobby,” complained Nellie. “I believe you’d joke if you were going to be hanged!”

“Do you think so?” asked Bobby, seriously. “Much obliged. That’s a good reputation to have, whether I deserve it or not.”

“Good for you, Bobs!” laughed Jess. “You keep still, old croaker!” she added, shaking Nellie Agnew. “Let’s look on the cheerful side of it. Every cloud has a silver lining.”

“If you can see any silver lining to *this* cloud, I’d like you to show it to me, Miss!” exclaimed Nellie, with some warmth.

Eve was going from window to window, thrusting her head and shoulders out of each, and examining the sides of the tower carefully. Laura asked what she was doing.

“Why, dear, on this side is the roof of the school building,” said Eve, thoughtfully. “It isn’t so far below us.”

“It’s much too far for us to jump,” returned Mother Wit.

“True,” said Eve, smiling. “But see here.”

‘I can’t climb out of the same window you are at,’ complained Laura.

“Go to the next one, then, and I’ll point it out to you.”

Laura did so. Sitting sideways on the sills the girls could thrust the upper part of their bodies out and obtain an unobstructed view of this entire wall of the tower.

“See that wire?” exclaimed Eve, eagerly.

Just below the level of the windows which pierced the upper story of the tower a heavy stay-wire was fastened to a staple set in the masonry. At some time the school building had been dressed with flags and bunting and this heavy wire had never been removed. It was fastened at the other end to a ring in the roof of the main building.

“I see it, Evangeline,” admitted Mother Wit, with something like fear in her voice. “You wouldn’t do it!”

“I believe I can,” declared the country girl.

“Why—why—it would take a trapeze performer!”

“Well, Mrs. Case has had us working on the ladders and the parallel bars until we ought to be pretty fair on a trapeze,” said Eve, laughing a little.

“Oh, Eve! I wouldn’t try it,” cried Laura.

"You see," said the other, steadily, "if I can get out of the window here, and two of you can steady me, I can drop down upon that wire——"

"But suppose you should fall to the roof!"

"I won't fall. That is not what I am aiming to do, at least."

"It is too reckless a thing to try," cried Laura.

"Now, wait. Nobody will see us up here. If we have to stay all night some of the girls will be sick. You know that. Now, if I can once get to that wire, I know I can work my way down it to the roof."

"You'll slide—and cut your hands all to pieces."

"No, I won't. I've a pair of thick gloves in my pocket," declared Eve. "I am going to try it, Mother Wit."

"Oh, I don't believe you had better!"

Eve slid back into the tower-room, Laura following her. The bigger girl slipped out of her coat and took off her hat immediately.

"Hullo!" said Bobby. "Don't you want your slippers, too? You're in for the night, are you?"

But Eve was finding her gloves and these she drew on. Even Nellie began to get interested then.

"What *are* you going to do now?" she cried.

Laura explained quickly. Nellie began to cry again, and even Bobby looked troubled.

"It isn't worth the risk, is it?" she asked.
"Somebody will find us some time."

"That's just it," Eve returned. "We don't know when that *some time* will be. I can slide down that wire, get in by the roof opening, and unlock this door that shuts us up here. Of course, the key will be in the lock. If it isn't, and there is nobody in the building, I can telephone for help."

"Say, that's great!" spoke Jess. "If you can only do it safely, Eve."

"Oh, I'll do it," declared the country girl, confidently, and the next moment she began climbing out through the window nearest to the wire.

Laura and Jess held her around the waist; then, as she slid out, farther and farther, they clung to her shoulders. But Eve had to leave her arms free and suddenly she panted:

"Let me go! I've got to drop and grab the wire. That's the only way."

Laura and her chum looked at each other in doubt and fear. It did seem as though, if they let go of the girl, she must fall to the foot of the tower!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CONSCIENCE OF PRETTYMAN SWEET

PRETTYMAN SWEET would never have played such a contemptible trick on Bobby Hargrew and her comrades had he not been goaded to it by Lily Pendleton. Purt had what the girls called "a dreadful crush" on Lily, and she had made fun of him because he took Bobby's jokes so tamely.

"If you had a spark of pluck you'd get square with that Hargrew girl," Lily Pendleton had told him, and Purt thought that he was getting square with Bobby and her friends when he turned the key in the lock at the foot of the tower stairs.

At first, as he ran out of the school building into the rain that was still falling a little, his only fear was that he had been seen by somebody. But once away from the school building he began to giggle over the joke he had played on the girls.

"They won't laugh at me so much next time," he thought.

And then he remembered, with something of a shock, that he could not afford to tell anybody about what he had done. If he owned up to having locked the girls into the tower, he knew very well what would happen to him.

If Chet Belding, or Lance Darby, did not get hold of him, one of the other boys would most certainly take him to task for the trick. And Purt Sweet was no fighter.

He wouldn't get much fun out of the trick he had played on the girls, after all! Now he wished he had not done it. What was the fun, when he had to keep it a secret?

So Purt continued on this way home with lagging feet. And every yard, the possibilities that might follow his trick grew plainer in his mind. He saw, as he went on, that instead of having done something to create a laugh, he might have been guilty of an act that would start a whole lot of trouble.

He knew, as well as did the girls shut up in the tower, that old John, the janitor, would go home to supper soon. And at this time of year, when there were no fires to see to, except the hot water heater, the old man might not come back at all.

For, as far as Purt knew, there were no meetings in the building that evening. At least, he

had heard none announced. The girls were likely to be left in the tower until the next day, while their friends were searching the city for them.

Purt went into the square, from which point he could gaze up at the tower. But it was so far away, and so tall, that he could see nothing at the narrow slits of windows up there at the top.

"If—if those girls waved a handkerchief out of the openings, nobody could see it down here," thought the conscience-stricken youth.

He had never been up in the tower himself, for it was forbidden territory. So he did not know how wide the windows were. It just struck home to Master Purt Sweet that the girls would be unable to signal their situation to anybody.

But he had reached home before these thoughts so troubled him that he felt as though he *must* undo what he had done. Perhaps John had not gone home yet. He might still be able to get into the building, creep upstairs, unlock the door of the tower, and then run out before the girls could catch and identify him.

For Purt had a very strong desire not to be suspected in this matter. Chet Belding would take up cudgels for his sister in a minute; and

Chet would, Purt was sure, thrash him most soundly!

Any of the teachers would have a pass-key to the building. Purt remembered that fact, too. Could he prevail upon one of them to lend him a key so that he could go into the building? Of course, he must have some good excuse, and he feared to appear before Professor Dimp with any such request unless he could back it with sound reason. And Mr. Sharp was entirely out of the question. Purt knew that the principal of Central High would see right through him instantly.

As for the lady teachers, Purt was more afraid of them than of Mr. Dimp and the principal. As it grew dark the boy sat cowering in his room at home, from the window of which he could see dimly the outlines of the school-house tower, and he wept a few tears.

He would have given a good deal had he not turned the key in that lock!

Purt didn't feel that he could appear at the dinner table; so he gave an excuse to his mother's maid, and went out again. Perhaps somebody had discovered the girls up in the tower and released them. He walked up Whiffle Street and saw Chet Belding hanging over the front gate.

"Hullo, Purt!" exclaimed the big fellow.
"What's doing?"

"No—nothing," stammered Purt.

"Well, don't be so scared about it. What's got you now?"

"No—nothing," stammered Purt again.

"Haven't seen Lance, have you?"

"No."

"Nor the girls?"

The question scared Purt Sweet through and through. But he plucked up courage to ask:

"How should I know anything about them? Hasn't your sister come home yet?"

"No. Down to that gym., I expect. Say, these girls are getting altogether too athletic. Didn't see Jess, either, did you?"

Purt shook his head and went on. He was afraid to stop longer with Chet—afraid that the latter would learn something about what he had done. It did seem to the culprit as though knowledge of the trick played on Laura Belding and her friends stuck out all over him.

It was deep dusk now. Purt came within a block of the school building and looked slyly about the corners, as though he were bent on mischief, instead of desirous of undoing the mischief he had already done.

Had old John gone home yet? Would all

the lower doors of Central High be locked? These were the questions that puzzled him.

Purt ran into the side gate of the boys' recreation ground and fumbled at the basement door, by which he knew the janitor usually left. It was locked; yet, as he rattled the knob, he thought he heard an answering sound within.

He scuttled away to the corner and there waited to watch the door. Nobody came out.

After half a minute of uncertainty the lad crept on to the boys' entrance. The outside doors were closed and locked. He ran around to the street and entered the girls' yard. The outer vestibule door was opened here and he ventured in, creeping along in the darkness and fumbling for the doorknob.

And just then Purt Sweet got the scare of his life. A strong hand clasped his wrist and a sharp voice demanded:

"What do you want here? Are you waiting for those girls, too?"

"Oh, dear me!" gasped Prettyman Sweet, his knees trembling. "*Now* I'm in a fix, sure enough!"

CHAPTER XIX

MARGIT AND MISS CARRINGTON MEET

IT was several seconds before Purt realized just what manner of person had seized him by the arm in the vestibule at the girls' entrance of Central High. It was so dark that Purt only knew it was a girl.

"Who—who are you?" he stammered.

"Oh! It's only a boy," said the girl, in a tone of disgust. "What do you want here?"

"I—I was trying to get in," murmured Purt.

"What for? Isn't this the girls' entrance? They told me it was."

Then Purt knew that she did not belong at Central High. Indeed, she was a different kind of girl from any the youth had ever met.

"Who are you, and what do *you* want?" asked Purt, plucking up courage. "I guess you don't go to Central High."

"I never went to any school—not like this, anyway."

"But what do you want here? I—I left

something in the building and wanted to get back and find it," stammered Purt.

"I was waiting to see those girls," said the stranger.

"What girls?" demanded the boy, in a panic again.

"Some that I know. I waited and watched down by that place where they play——"

"The athletic field?" suggested Purt.

"Perhaps. And I asked another girl. She said they had not come down from the school yet. They were kept in. So I came up here——"

"Who were the girls you want to see?"

"One is named Evangeline, and she comes from Switzerland. I am Austrian myself. And there is another girl—a little girl who always laughs. Her name is like a boy's name."

"Bobby Hargrew," said Purt, with a stifled groan. "And neither of those girls have come out of the building yet?"

"No," said the girl. "I have watched and waited for more than an hour."

Purt rattled the knob of the inner door desperately; but it was locked and evidently there was nobody within to hear him.

"They must be away upstairs and cannot hear you," said the strange girl.

And *that* scared Purt, too. It seemed to him that this girl must know just what he had done to those girls whom she was waiting for. He started to leave the vestibule.

"Hold on! Isn't there any other door we can get in by?" asked the stranger.

"I'm—I'm going to try the main entrance. Perhaps that is unlocked," Purt replied.

"I'll go with you," volunteered the other, and followed him down the steps.

Purt wanted to get rid of her, whoever she was. He wished now that he hadn't come back to the schoolhouse. He had read somewhere that criminals are driven by some mysterious power to haunt the scenes of their crimes. And it must be a fact, Purt told himself, for he had certainly been foolish to come back here to Central High—and go without his supper.

He decided to slip out of the girls' yard and run away. But when he reached the street there was the strange girl right at his elbow. And he remembered that she had a grip as firm as Chet Belding's own.

So nothing would do but try the front entrance. Of course, he knew it was ridiculous to go to that door. Even by day it was kept locked and visitors had to ring; only the teachers had pass-keys.

But they went in at the main gate and mounted the steps of the portico. It was indeed black under here, for the street lights were too far away to cast any of their radiance into the place. Purt fumbled around, found the door-knob, and tried it. To his amazement it turned in his hand and the door swung open into the dark corridor.

"They're here, then," whispered the girl. "Where do you suppose they are?" she continued.

Now Purt had very good reason for believing that he knew just where the girls were whom this stranger wished to see; but he only said, gruffly:

"I'm sure I don't know. I don't believe they're in the building now."

"Oh, yes, they are. They have not come out. There are several beside those I named. So I was told at the athletic field."

"Well, I don't know anything about them!" denied Purt, hurriedly. "I—I just want to go up for my book——"

He shook himself free and ran for the front stairway. He knew his way in the dark and hoped to leave the girl behind. Once let him reach the foot of the tower stairs, he would unlock the door, fling it open so that the pris-

oners would hear him above, and then dart down the boys' stairway and so out of the school building again.

But before he reached the top of the first flight he heard the patter of the strange girl's footsteps beside him. Through the long windows enough light filtered to show him her figure. And she ran better than he did, and without panting.

Purt was scared now worse than he had been before.

"She'll tell them who unlocked the door," he thought, "and so they'll know right away who imprisoned them in the first place. Then Laura will tell her brother and Chet will thrash me—I know he will!"

The lad was almost ready to cry now. It seemed to him as though every step he took got him deeper and deeper into trouble.

He dashed up the other flight two steps at a time; but the girl kept on equal terms with him. What good wind she had! She could beat many of the girls of Central High in running, that was sure.

"I don't know what has become of Eve Sitz and that other girl you want to see," exclaimed Purt, stopping suddenly. "And I don't see why you are sticking so close to me."

"You know your way around this building; I don't," declared the girl, shortly.

"I can't help you find them——"

"You seem afraid of something," remarked the girl, shrewdly. "What's the matter with you?"

"Well, I go to school here," complained Purt. "You don't. You'll get into trouble, coming into the building at night."

"I guess you're afraid of getting into trouble yourself," returned the other, quite unshaken.

"Well, if one of the teachers is here and finds us——"

"I'll tell them just what I came for. Will you?" demanded the girl, quickly, and thrusting her face into Purt's so as to see him better.

She had him there! Purt knew it—and he knew *she* knew it. This strange girl was laughing softly to herself in the darkness.

"Go on—if you're going anywhere," said she, after a minute. "I believe you know where those girls are. I want to see that Evangeline and that Hargrew girl. You show me."

"I—I don't know!" wailed Purt, under his breath.

Then he was sure he heard somebody's step. It was in one of the classrooms opening into this corridor.

At the sound, spurred by sudden terror, the boy leaped away. He was half-way down the corridor. Around the corner was the door of the tower.

And then, just as he dashed past a door on his right, it opened. A broad band of light streamed out, and to Purt's ears came the quick demand:

"What's this? Who are you?"

"It's Gee Gee!" thought the boy, but he never stopped. In a moment he realized that Miss Carrington had not addressed her question to him, but to the girl.

He ran on, as softly as possible, and rounded the corner, knowing that the strange girl had been caught by the teacher, who repeated her demand in a louder and more emphatic tone.

"Who are you? What are you doing here in the schoolhouse?" Then Miss Carrington saw that the girl was not one of her scholars—indeed, no girl of Central High was ever dressed so gaily, unless it was at a masquerade.

"For goodness sake, child!" exclaimed the teacher, still more sharply. "Come in here and explain yourself."

She drew her inside the classroom and closed the door. In the full light the strange girl was revealed in a purple velvet skirt, a green bodice,

a yellow silk scarf, or handkerchief, around her neck, and with a net, on which steel beads were sewed, over her hair. With her dark complexion and high color she was indeed a striking figure as she stood there, hands on her hips, and panting slightly as she gazed back bravely into Miss Carrington's spectacled eyes.

"For goodness sake, child!" repeated the teacher. "Who and what are you?"

"My name is Margit Salgo," said the Gypsy girl, watching Miss Carrington, with her sharp black eyes.

"Salgo?" whispered the teacher, and for a moment the girl thought that Miss Carrington would sink into the nearest chair. Then she drew herself up and, although her pallor remained, her eyes sparkled behind the thick lenses of her spectacles.

"I suppose you are here to tell me your father was Belas Salgo?" demanded the lady, harshly.

"I don't know who you are, Madam," said the Gypsy girl. "Are you the lady whom the Vareys say knows all about me?"

"Who are the Vareys?" returned Miss Carrington, quickly.

"They are English Gypsies. I was placed in their care when my father's friends brought me

to this country. They have held me prisoner; but I have got away from them——”

“I do not understand you—I do not understand you,” insisted Miss Carrington, weakly. And now she did grope her way to a seat.

“Are you the teacher here whose name has in it eighteen letters?” asked the girl, anxiously. “I do not read your English, although I speak it. I learn to speak languages easily—it is a gift. My father had it.”

“True,” murmured Miss Carrington. “Belas Salgo was a wonderful linguist.”

“Does your name have the eighteen letters?” pursued Margit, eagerly. She repeated her story about the card on which was printed, or written, the name of the lady whom the Vareys had come to Centerport to see. Miss Carrington listened more quietly, and finally bowed.

“Yes. I am the lady. I am Miss Carrington,” she admitted.

“That is what those girls called you,” muttered Margit, but the teacher did not hear.

“You claim to be Belas Salgo’s daughter?” repeated Miss Carrington, at last.

“I am his daughter. I cannot remember my mother—much. But my father I remember very well. Why, I traveled everywhere with him! All over southern Europe we went. And

to Algiers, and the other north coast cities. He played everywhere about the Mediterranean until he died. And then," said the girl, simply, "I lost all happiness—and I was brought to this great, cold country."

Miss Carrington had listened with her head resting on her hand and her eyes watching the girl from behind her glasses. Now she said:

"Well, I do not believe you are Belas Salgo's child—not the Belas Salgo I have good reason to remember. No. But I will take you home with me and we will talk this matter over.

"I was correcting some examination papers," she added, going to the desk and turning out the student lamp. "But they may go until another time," and with a sigh she put on her hat and cloak, and taking the Gypsy girl's hand led her out of the school building, the darkened corridors of which she knew so well.

CHAPTER XX

INTER-CLASS RIVALRY

IF Eve Sitz had been outside of the school-house tower, being held by the girls all of this time, she must certainly have been by now at the point of exhaustion, and so must they.

But Eve had dropped just right, had caught the wire with her gloved hands just as she had expected to, and then swung down and hung from the steel strand for a few seconds to get her breath.

Nellie and Bobby, leaning out of neighboring windows, cheered her on.

"Hurrah, girls!" declared the irrepressible. "She's going to do it. There she goes—hand under hand!"

"Oh, if she doesn't slip," wailed Nellie.

"She's not going to slip," cried Bobby. "Hurrah! She's on the roof."

Once on the main building Eve did not waste time. She ran to the door, which she knew

would be open, and so darted down the stairs to the corridor out of which the tower stairway opened. There was the key in the lock as they had expected, and in a few moments she was calling the other four girls down.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Nellie, kissing Eve when she reached the foot of the stairs. "Aren't you just the brave, brave girl! And whatever should we have done without you?"

"I guess one of the others would have done the same had I not first thought of it," returned Eve, modestly.

"Hush!" exclaimed Laura, suddenly. "I hear somebody."

A door opened below, and then somebody came up stairs. The girls crowded back into the corner and waited.

"I know that step," whispered Jess.

"Fee, fi, fo, fum!" murmured Bobby.

"And well may you say it is your 'foe,' Bobby," giggled Jess. "It's Miss Carrington."

"Never!" gasped Nell.

"Yes, it is. I am sure," agreed Laura.

"Oh, dear! if she catches us here we'll have to tell where we have been and all about it," groaned Eve.

"And demerits to work off to-morrow," moaned Bobby.

"Back into the stairway and keep still," whispered Laura.

They all crowded back. Miss Carrington came along the gloomy corridor and entered a classroom. She did not turn the corner.

"Good! Now let's creep down and make our escape," whispered Bobby.

"But not by the front door. She came in that way."

"But the other doors will be locked—both the boys' and ours," urged Jess.

"I know the way out through the basement," spoke Bobby, with determination. "I can open John's door. Come on."

So, at the very moment Prettyman Sweet tried the basement door, the girls on whom he had played his trick were about to come out. Purt was scared and ran away. Later, when he escaped from Margit, the Gypsy girl, and ran to the foot of the tower stairs, Purt was scared again.

He found the door open and the girls gone. Who could have released them? He slunk home in the darkness, taking the back alleys instead of Whiffle Street, and the next day he scarcely dared go to school for fear the girls had found out who played the trick on them.

But Laura and her mates all thought that

either John, the janitor, or one of the teachers had chanced to close the tower door and lock it. And, as they had been where they were forbidden to go, they said very little about their fright and anxiety.

But Eve was quite a heroine among them. The girl from the farm was a deal more muscular than most of her mates; perhaps no girl at Central High could have climbed out of that tower window and worked her way down the wire in just that manner.

And Eve was showing herself, as time went on, to be the best girl at the broad jump and at putting the twelve-pound shot, too. Lou Potter, of the senior class, did well; but after a time she seemed to have reached her limit in both the jumping and shot-putting.

Then it was that Eve took a spurt and went ahead. She left all other competitors but Lou far behind.

Mrs. Case did not approve of inter-class competition in athletics; but the managing committee of the June meet had made such competition necessary to a degree. The upper classes of Central High had to choose their champions, and those champions in the foot races, from the 100-yard dash to the quarter-mile, had to compete the first week in June to arrange which

should represent the school on the big day.

In other trials it was the same—broad jump, shot-putting, relay race teams, and all the rest. There was developed in the freshman class a sprinter who almost bested Bobby Hargrew at first; but the freshmen had little, after all, to do when the big day came.

The main contestants for athletic honors were bound to be drawn from the junior and sophomore classes. It was a fact that the present senior class of Central High had not been as imbued with the spirit of after-hour athletics, or with loyalty to the school, as had the younger classes.

And the seniors had awakened too late to the importance of leaving a good record in athletics behind them when they were graduated. There was not a girl in the class the equal of Mary O'Rourke, or Celia Prime, who had been graduated the year before.

Lou Potter, however, had many supporters, not alone among her own class. The freshies and sophs of course were jealous of the prominence of the juniors in athletics, so they centered their loyalty upon Lou.

Eve could do nothing that Lou Potter couldn't do! That was the cry, and the feeling ran quite high for a while. Besides, another

thing came to make Eve rather unpopular with a certain class of girls.

"Touch Day"—that famous occasion when candidates for membership in the M. O. R.'s were chosen—came in May, and Eve was one of the lucky girls to receive the magic "touch." The fact that she had not been attending Central High a year aroused bitter feeling, although Eve was a junior in good standing.

"Say!" cried Bobby Hargrew, "if they had kicked about *me* being an M. O. R. there would have been some sense in it. For I never really thought I'd arrive at such an honor."

For Bobby had really been drawn as a member of the secret society, and she never ceased to be surprised at the fact. But this school year—especially since early spring—Bobby Hargrew had been much changed. Not that she was not cheerful, and full of fun; but she had settled down to better work in her classes, and there was a steadiness about her that had been missing in the old Bobby Hargrew.

They were talking this change over one evening around the Belding dinner table.

"Bobby wouldn't be herself if she got too strait-laced," remarked Chetwood. "That's the main good thing about her—the ginger in her."

"Chetwood!" exclaimed his mother, admon-

ishingly. "You speak of the girl as though she were a horse—or a dog. 'Ginger' indeed!"

"Well, Little Mum," said her big son. "That's exactly what I mean. She's no namby-pamby, Miss Sissy kind of a girl; but a good fellow——"

"I cannot allow you to talk that way about one of your young lady friends," declared Mrs. Belding, with heat. "I am surprised, Chetwood."

Mr. Belding began to chuckle, and she turned on him now with some exasperation.

"James!" she said, warmly. "I believe you support these children in their careless use of English, and in their other crimes against the niceties of our existence. Chet is as boisterous and rough as—as a street boy. And Laura uses most shocking language at times, I declare."

"Oh, Mother Mine! why drag me into it?" laughed Laura, while her father added:

"Isn't 'crimes' a rather strong word in this instance, Mother?"

"I do not care!" cried the good lady, much disturbed. "Chetwood uses language that I know my mother would never have allowed at her table. And Laura is so taken up with these dreadful athletics that she cares nothing for the things which used to interest me when I was a

girl. She really doesn't like to pour tea for me Wednesday afternoons."

"I admit it," said Laura, *sotto voce*.

"Do you blame her?" added Chet, grumbly.

"Thank goodness! I was brought up differently," declared Mrs. Belding, sternly. "We girls were not allowed to do such awful things—even in private—as you do, Laura, in your gymnasium——"

"Hear! hear!" cried Father Belding, finally rapping on the table with the handle of his knife. "I must say a word here. Mother, you are too hard on the young folks."

"No I am not, James," said the good lady, bridling.

"You force me to say something that may hurt your feelings; but I believe you have forgotten it. You complain of Laura's athletics and gymnasium work. Don't you see that it is an escape valve for the overflow of animal spirits that the girls of our generation, Mother, missed?"

"I deny that the girls of *my* day possessed such 'animal spirits,' as you call them," declared Mrs. Belding, vehemently.

"You force me," said Mr. Belding, gravely, yet with a twinkle in his eyes, "to prove my

case. Children! did I ever tell you about the first view I had of your dear mother?"

"No, Pop! Tell us," urged Chet, who kept on eating despite his interest in the discussion.

"Mr. Belding!" gasped his wife, suddenly. "What are you——"

"Sorry, my dear; you force me to it," said her husband, with continued gravity. "But the first sight I ever had of your mother, children, was when she was six or seven years old. I was working for old Mr. Cummings, whose business I finally bought out, and I came to your mother's house on an errand."

"James!" cried Mrs. Belding. "I cannot allow you to tell that foolish thing. It—it is disgraceful."

"It is indeed," admitted her husband, nodding. "But if you and your school girl friends had been as much devoted to athletics as Laura and her little friends, I doubt if you would have needed the front stairs bannisters as an escape valve for your animal spirits."

"For, children," added Mr. Belding, as his wife, her face very rosy, got up to come around the table to him, "my first view of your mother was her coming down stairs at express train speed, a-straddle of the bannisters!"

Mrs. Belding reached him then, and any fur-

ther particulars of this "disgraceful" story, were smothered promptly. But Laura and Chet enjoyed immensely the fact that—once upon a time, at least—there had been some little element of tomboyishness in their mother's character.

CHAPTER XXI

MARGIT'S MYSTERY

To the amazement of the girls of Central High—particularly those seven who had been on the early Spring tramp to Fielding and had first seen the Gypsy girl when she ran away from Queen Grace Varey and the other Romany folk—Margit Salgo, as she called herself, appeared suddenly in the class rooms of the school. And, to complete their bewilderment, she appeared as the attendant of Miss Carrington!

Margit spoke little to any of the other girls. She came to Eve and Bobby and told them how she had been made to leave the farmhouse by the Vareys, who had come after her in the night; but how she had finally got away from them, and her connection with Miss Carrington, she would not explain, although Bobby was very curious.

"Well, doesn't that beat all!" ejaculated Bobby, to Eve Sitz. "And we thought we might be able to help Margit. She seems to have helped herself, all right."

"I am glad, if she is now in good hands; but I do not understand it," rejoined Eve.

"Say! there can't be any mistake about her wanting to get to Miss Carrington before. Now she's got to Gee Gee, all right. Guess there's nothing to be said by outside parties, eh?"

"Well, we can wonder—eh?"

"Oh, there's no law against it. Take it out in wondering. You can be sure that Gee Gee will be as mum as an oyster."

"But where is Queen Grace—and the others?" added Eve.

"That's so," Bobby returned. "If Miss Carrington hasn't settled with the Romanies and given them what they wanted, you can make sure that they will take a hand in the matter again."

Margit, however, seemed to have cut loose from the Gypsies altogether. When she appeared at Central High with the teacher she was dressed like any other girl coming from a well-to-do home. Her Gypsy garb had been discarded.

Margit sat by herself and she had special lessons. She did not recite with the other girls, nor did she have much to say to any of them, save to Eve and Bobby. Even Mother Wit was not very successful in scraping an acquaintance with the Austro-Hungarian.

Indeed, when one of the girls tried to talk with her, Margit answered in German; or, if the girl was taking German and could understand the spoken language pretty well, Margit used the outlandish dialect of the Romany folk, and that settled it.

Either she did not wish to make acquaintances, or she had been warned by Miss Carrington not to satisfy the curiosity of the girls of Central High about herself.

Of course nobody dared to question Gee Gee. If Mr. Sharp understood the reason for the new girl's presence he gave no sign—ignored her entirely, in fact. So the girls were vastly excited about Margit Salgo, her presence at Central High, where she came from, and—particularly—what relationship she bore to Gee Gee.

One day the teacher was particularly short-tempered and found reason for taking Bobby Hargrew to task over some trivial fault.

"I am amazed, Miss Hargrew, that so light-minded a girl as you ever won your way into the M. O. R. chapter. I do not see, Miss, but that you are just as mischievous as ever. Neither time nor place changes you."

She said it very spitefully, and some of the other girls laughed. But suddenly Margit popped up and said something vigorously in Ger-

man—speaking so quickly that the other girls did not understand her; but Gee Gee evidently understood.

Her face flamed and she glared at the Gypsy girl in a way that would have quelled any other in the room. But Margit did not wither under her glance. She stared back, her head up and shoulders squared; and it was plain by her attitude that she defied Gee Gee.

Bobby was as amazed as the others. Margit had taken her part against the teacher. And for the moment it seemed as though there would be a serious breach between Gee Gee and her protegee.

However, the incident effectually called Gee Gee's attention away from Bobby, and the latter heard nothing more of *her* fault. But it seemed that the connection between the teacher and Margit Salgo was not founded upon *love*. There was some other reason than affection that made Gee Gee care for the half-wild Gypsy girl. Some of the others whispered that Gee Gee must have done some awful thing, and Margit knew it and so held the teacher in her power. But that, of course, was a silly explanation of the mystery.

It was plain, too, that the teacher would not let Margit out of her sight on the street. They came and went to school together, walking side

by side. At the place where Miss Carrington had boarded so long, nobody ever saw Margit in the yard, but Miss Carrington was with her.

One might have thought the girl a prisoner.

Bobby was hurrying over to Laura's house with her books, one morning, wishing for a little help in one of the problems to be discussed that day, and she started through the grounds surrounding the Widow Boyce's house, from the back street.

Suddenly she saw a man crouching in the shrubbery. Weeks before she had seen a man spying about the house, and believed him to be one of the Gypsies. Now Bobby halted and spied on the Peeping Tom himself.

In a moment she saw that it was the man with the gold rings in his ears whom Eve had told her was Jim Varey, the husband of the Gypsy Queen. He was lurking there for no good purpose, that was sure.

Having carried Margit off from Farmer Sitz's house in the middle of the night, the Gypsies would doubtless attempt to steal the girl away from Gee Gee, as well. The school teacher had evidently not settled with the Romany folk. They had not yet got money through the girl, as Margit had said they hoped to do.

Bobby turned back toward the street, intend-

ing to look for a policeman, or for some neighbor; but as she did so she heard wheels grating against the curb, and there stood a covered wagon, with two sleek horses attached, and another Gypsy man driving them.

The man on the seat of the wagon whistled, and Jim Varey raised his hand as a signal. Then the latter darted around the corner of the house toward the front.

These manœuvres were only too plain to Bobby. There was not time to look for a policeman—and, in any case, an officer was hard to find in the Hill section of Centerport.

Bobby ran along the hedge, stooping so as not to be seen by the man on the wagon seat, and came around to the front of the house from the direction opposite that which Jim Varey had taken.

Just as she reached the front porch there was a wild scream from Miss Carrington, and Bobby saw the man leap from the far end of the porch with Margit in his arms.

Margit did not scream; she only beat the man about the head and—perhaps—left the marks of her nails in his dark face.

It was plain that she was being carried away from Gee Gee against her will. She had no desire to go back to the Gypsies.

Now, Miss Carrington could not run. She had been brought up in no athletic school, that was sure. She followed the kidnapper clumsily enough, and he would have gotten well away in the covered wagon with the girl, had it remained to Gee Gee to intervene.

But Bobby screamed, dropped her books, and went at the fellow as though she were playing football. She "tackled low," seizing with both arms about the knees, and Jim Varey, screeching and threatening, fell forward on the sward—and Margit escaped from his arms.

"Oh!" gasped the girl.

"Quick! get into the house!" cried Bobby, bounding to her feet.

Margit whisked past her, and past Miss Carrington, and fled indoors as she was advised. Jim Varey leaped up and confronted the little girl who had overturned him. His fists were clenched and he gabbled in the Romany tongue a string of what were evidently threats and vituperation.

"Now, it isn't me you want to carry off," said Bobby, bravely. "I wouldn't be any good to you. Get away, now, for I see Mr. Sharp coming down the street."

Which was true enough—although the school principal was still a long way off. Jim Varey

seemed to see the wisdom of the girl's remarks, however, for he turned and fled.

The next minute they heard the heavy wagon being driven furiously away from the garden gate, and Bobby turned to find Gee Gee, sitting very faint and white, upon the porch steps.

CHAPTER XXII

LOU POTTER SCORES ONE

"HAS he gone?" gasped Gee Gee, weakly.

"They've driven off, Miss Carrington. Margit is in no danger now," said Bobby, eyeing the teacher curiously.

"You—you know about it, too, do you?" murmured the teacher.

"I guess I know something about it," replied Bobby, promptly. "We girls saw Margit up there in the hills when she ran away from the Gypsies the first time. And I was over to Eve Sitz's the night the Vareys stole Margit away again. I'd see the police if I were you, Miss Carrington."

"The police—yes!" returned the lady. "It will all have to be dragged into publicity, I suppose."

Bobby didn't know what to say, for she did not understand Gee Gee's present character, anyway! Nobody before had ever seen Miss Grace Gee Carrington so disturbed in her mind.

Bobby saw the front door open again, and Margit appeared on the porch.

"Come in! Come in! It's all right now," said the Gypsy girl. "There is nothing to fear from them now—— Ah! who is this?"

Bobby turned quickly and saw a little, stooped old man, turning in at the gate. Miss Carrington saw him, too, and she came to her feet in a moment. The color came back into her face and she began to look very grim again—more like her usual self.

"Morning! morning!" cackled the old gentleman, nodding at the school teacher, but looking hard at Bobby. And the latter recognized him as Eben Chumley, a queer, miserly old man who owned a great deal of property on the Hill.

"Good morning, Mr. Chumley," said Miss Carrington, quietly.

"Now, don't tell me *this* is the gal," said Mr. Chumley, pointing a long finger at Bobby. "For that's Tom Hargrew's young 'un—I know her well enough."

"*This* is the girl I wish you to see and talk with, Mr. Chumley," said Miss Carrington, beckoning Margit forward. Then she added, in her severest tone: "Miss Hargrew! you are excused."

"Well, the mean cat!" muttered Bobby, as

she went out of the yard. "I had no intention of listening to their private affairs. But she might at least have thanked me for tumbling over that Gypsy."

Margit came to her, however, that morning, and thanked her warmly.

"You're a brave girl, Miss Hargrew," she said. "And I think that Jim Varey will let me alone hereafter. At least, he had better keep his distance."

And so it seemed, for thereafter, when Miss Carrington and her charge walked to and from school, a policeman strolled behind them. The girls—especially those of the junior class, however—were almost eaten up with curiosity.

Luckily, as June approached, they had something else to think about out of regular recitation hours. The rivalry on the athletic field became very keen indeed. Mrs. Case did her best to impress upon the girls' minds that a spirit of rivalry between classes would perhaps injure the chances of the school at large at the final meet.

"Loyalty to Central High!" was her battle cry. But all of the girls—especially a certain portion of the seniors—forgot the "good of the greater number" in the petty class differences.

Lou Potter, the senior, was backed strongly for first place in putting the shot and for the

broad jump. Nobody but Mrs. Case, indeed, knew just how Lou and Eve Sitz stood in those two events.

The Saturday afternoon came when Mrs. Case was to try out the girls with the highest scores in the various events to be featured on the Big Day. Relay teams from each class had been gradually made up, and now these were to compete for the honor of representing Central High at the meet.

The Junior Four was made up of Laura Belding, Jess Morse, and Dora and Dorothy Lockwood, with Bobby Hargrew as substitute. They were not only all fast, but they were quick-witted. A relay race isn't altogether won with one's feet.

The seniors averaged taller girls, and heavier. The sophomores were nearer the weight and size of Laura and her mates; and of course, it was scarcely to be expected that the freshman four would stand a chance at all.

When the three heats were run off, however, the freshmen proved better than the seniors once, and surpassed the sophomores in two of the heats. The juniors won all three heats in fast time.

"Those squabs are coming on to be jim-dandies!" declared Bobby, enthusiastically.

"They're going to be just such another class in athletics as ours."

"And of course," remarked Lou Potter, who overheard her, "the junior class of Central High is just the most wonderful crowd of girls that was ever brought together."

"Now you've said it," admitted Bobby, with satisfaction. "But I never did expect to hear a senior say that about us!"

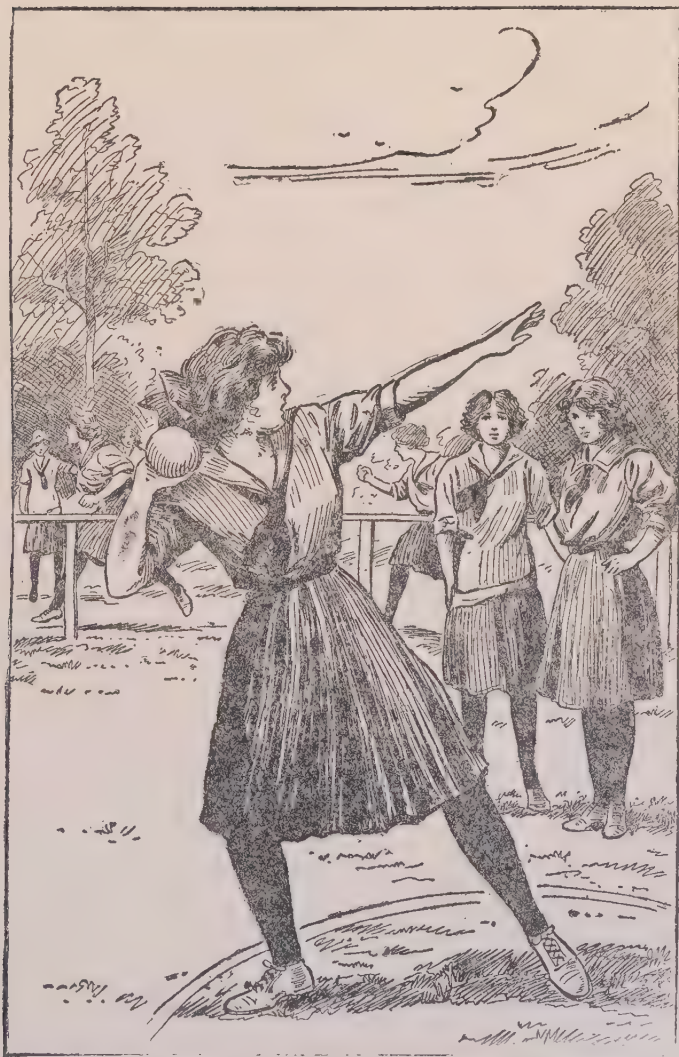
Mrs. Case came over and her presence halted further bickering. But the rivalry of the two upper classes rankled.

Bobby took the hundred-yard dash from all competitors. Later she easily beat all the other entries in the quarter-mile race.

Interest centered after that in the broad jump and the shot-putting contest. Eve was in her usual good form and equalled, in her three trials, her best previous record. Just what that record had been the girls as a body did not know; but on this occasion the distance was made public. Eve had bested all competitors by a full inch and a half. Her nearest rival was Lou Potter.

"Favoritism!" was the cry among the seniors, but they were very careful not to allow their physical instructor hear it.

In truth, Mrs. Case, as she always had been, was opposed to inter-class trials on the field or



EVE PUT THE TWELVE-POUND SHOT FAR AHEAD OF HER RIVAL.

Girls of Central High on Track and Field

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track. It lowered the standard of loyalty to the school as a whole, and was frequently the cause of bickerings and heart-burnings, as in this present case.

But she was bound by the rules of a committee in which she had but one vote. She was glad to learn, however, that other instructors in other schools were having the same trouble. The Girls' Branch Athletic League is truly against rivalry between classes of the same school.

In putting the shot the same unfortunate feeling arose between backers of Lou Potter and Evangeline Sitz. Eve carried the day; she put the twelve-pound shot far ahead of her rival. But the seniors were not satisfied. Their class would make a poor showing indeed at the meet.

"I'd just like to get square with that Swiss doll!" exclaimed Lou Potter, as she turned out of the gate of the athletic field, after it was all over and Mrs. Case had announced who would be the representatives of the school in each department of athletics, at the June meet.

"She is a foreigner, anyway. Laura Belding got her to come to this school. She'd much better have gone to Keyport, where she belongs," cried one of Lou's classmates.

They could not see that Eve's presence at Central High was likely to give the school at

least two points in athletics; that Keyport might have won had the country girl attended the Keyport High, as she had first intended.

"There she goes now—aiming for the railroad station," said Lou Potter. "I wish something would keep her from getting to the field on the day of the meet."

It was this mean thought in her mind, perhaps, that made Miss Potter notice Eve particularly as she followed behind the country girl. Lou's friends separated from her, but her way led toward the railroad station, too.

And before that was reached Miss Potter suddenly became aware of the fact that a woman and a man were following Eve Sitz.

She saw them first standing at a corner, and whispering, and pointing after Eve. They were dark-faced people, foreign-looking, and the man wore hoops of gold in his ears.

"There are a lot of those Gypsies around this Spring," was Lou's first thought. "Hullo! those people are watching that Sitz girl."

She became curious, as she saw the Gypsies dog Eve's footsteps for block after block. Whether they wished to speak to the big girl, or were just watching her, Lou could not tell.

She was a bold girl herself, and not at all afraid of the Romany folk. When Eve disap

peared into the railroad station and the man and woman remained outside, Lou walked up to them.

"What are you following that girl for?" she asked, and when Queen Grace and her husband would have denied it, Lou made her reason for asking plain.

"If you don't like her, neither do I. I'd like to have her out of the way for at least one day—one day next week," and she named the day of the Athletic Meet.

"This is a plot to trap us," growled Jim Varey to his wife.

But the Gypsy Queen was, as we have seen, a very shrewd student of human nature. She could see just how bad a heart Lou Potter had. Queen Grace possessed no occult power. No so-called fortune-teller has. They are all wicked people, and liars. But she had long made a study of the worst side of human nature.

She saw that Lou Potter was ripe for mischief. She talked to her softly and insinuatingly, putting Jim out of the way. Then she agreed to meet the senior again and learn just what she wished done to Eve Sitz.

For the Gypsy Queen saw a chance to make a few dollars and, as Margit Salgo had said, the woman was very avaricious. She and her

husband had been following Eve idly enough. They dared not approach Margit while she was under the protection of Miss Carrington and the police; but they laid to Eve a part of the blame for the Gypsy girl's escape from their hands before they had made any money out of her.

Lou Potter went away from her conference with the Gypsies very much delighted.

"I guess we'll show them that the seniors have something to say about athletics at Central High," she muttered, over and over again. "I reckon I've scored one on Miss Eve Sitz, too!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIELD DAY

THERE was a tall, gaunt, gray man who came to the Widow Boyce's to see Miss Carrington on certain occasions. He always carried a blue bag, stuffed with papers and books, and it was well known by the neighbors that he was Miss Carrington's lawyer.

There was nothing suggestive of romance about Aaron MacCullough; but like all old attorneys he had dabbled in many, many romances. There were a score of old families of Centerport who had entrusted their cupboard secrets to Mr. MacCullough.

He came in one evening, with his blue bag, and sat down in Gee Gee's sitting room. The Central High teacher was quite as dry in appearance, and as grim as the lawyer himself. She sat on one side of the table, and he on the other, and the papers which he first examined and read aloud he passed to her, and she scrutinized them through her spectacles.

"So," she said, at length, "these correspondents of yours in Buda-Pesth seem to know all about Salgo's affairs, do they?"

"It is notorious, Miss Carrington," said the old man, nodding. "There can be no mistake. Belas Salgo was a strange man. All geniuses, perhaps, are strange——"

"He was a wicked foreigner!" declared Miss Carrington, sharply.

"Wicked in your eyes, perhaps. He married and carried away with him your dearest friend."

"My cousin Anne—yes," said she, slowly. "She had been in my care. She was musical. She went mad over the man—and he no better than a Gypsy."

"Gypsy blood he confessed to—yes," said the lawyer, shaking his head. "But he could make wonderful music. I remember hearing him once in this very town."

"Oh, he charmed everybody—but me," said Miss Carrington, vigorously. "And he would have charmed me, perhaps, with his fiddle if Anne had not gone mad over him. I knew how it would be for her—misery and trouble!"

"We do not know that," said the old gentleman, shaking his head. "Her few years with Belas Salgo were happy enough, by all account."

"But she never wrote to me!" cried the Central High teacher.

"Nor she never wrote to her father's partner, Mr. Chumley. Eben Chumley, by the way, is for denying the identity of this girl, Margit?"

"Well! so was I," admitted Miss Carrington. "Though heaven knows it was for another reason! I did not think poor Anne would have had a daughter and never written me a word about it."

"Ahem!" said Mr. MacCullough, clearing his throat significantly, "your last word to her, I understand, was a harsh one?"

"Ah! But I never meant it. She must have known I never meant it," exclaimed Miss Carrington, her voice trembling.

The old lawyer shook his head. "We never do mean the harsh words," he murmured.

"However," he added, after a moment's silence. "The fact remains that this girl, Margit Salgo, is assuredly the daughter of Belas Salgo and Anne Carrington. The money—what there was of it—left in the hands of Eben Chumley by his partner, 'Anne's father, belongs to the child, and Eben must be made to disgorge."

"It will hurt Chumley dreadfully to give up the money," said Gee Gee, quickly. "How much is there?"

"Less than a thousand dollars. You know, Chumley & Carrington were in the real estate business in only a small way, back in those days.

With interest, and all, it will be but a modest fortune."

"I suppose those Gypsies thought the child was a great heiress," said the teacher.

"That is probable. They undoubtedly think so now. It is my advice that you allow me to go to the police and explain the matter fully. Let them gather in this Jim Varey, and the others, and tell them just how little the sum is that is coming to Margit Salgo. It is about enough for her education—and that's all."

Miss Carrington nodded. "Nevertheless," she said, with finality, "she is Cousin Anne's child. I shall make her education and future keeping my affair. I have not worked, and taught, all these years for nothing, Mr. MacCullough."

"Quite true—quite true," admitted the old man, briskly. "And if you wish to adopt the girl——"

"I intend to do so," announced Gee Gee.

"Then there is nobody to gainsay you, I am certain," declared the lawyer, rising. "I congratulate the child upon falling in with so good a guardian, Miss Carrington. And—perhaps—you are to be congratulated, too," he added to himself as he left her sitting grimly by the table.

For more than Lawyer MacCullough noted the

change that was gradually coming over the martinet teacher of Central High. Whether it was the influence of Margit's presence, or not, it was true that Miss Carrington was not half so harsh as she used to be.

"Change of heart—she's sure to die, I'm afraid," announced Bobby Hargrew, one day, when Gee Gee had failed to seize the opportunity to berate that young lady for a certain fault.

But later, Miss Carrington put herself out to speak to Bobby on the street, and upon matters not connected with the school work.

"Clara, I never properly thanked you for taking my ward's part the other morning when that dreadful man attacked her," said Miss Carrington, quietly. "But I am grateful, nevertheless."

"Your ward!" gasped Bobby, her curiosity and wonder passing all bounds of politeness. "Oh, Miss Carrington! is she really related to you?"

"Margit? Not in the least—at least, no relation that the law would allow. For that reason I propose to adopt her. She will be known as Margaret Carrington—and I hope, Miss Clara, that you and the other girls of Central High will be kind to her."

Bobby smiled. "I think Margit will take care of herself, Miss Carrington, if we don't treat

her right. But I know all the girls will be glad to have her join."

"Thank you. She is foreign to your ways, as yet," pursued the teacher, a little doubtfully. "From what she says, she is much interested in Mrs. Case's classes—in the physical culture classes, and the like. I—I expect you will introduce her at the gymnasium, Miss Clara?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Bobby, half stunned. "Why—why Margit's the surest-footed girl I ever saw. You ought to see her running that day along the top of the stone wall!"

"Er—I presume that such unseemly conduct will not be necessary if Margaret becomes a votary of athletics as taught the young ladies of Central High," returned Miss Carrington, stiffly.

"Just the same," Bobby said, in talking over the matter with Laura and the rest of the girls, afterwards, "just the same, Margit Salgo will be a splendid addition to our fighting force some day. Why, she's got biceps like a boy, and she says she can swim, and skate, and ride. We're going to have another A-1 champion for Central High in Margit Salgo some day!"

It must be confessed that, about this time, many of the Central High girls gave more thought to athletic matters than they did to their

lessons. Still, the unbending rule that only those who kept up with their studies would have a part in the after-hour athletic contests was a solvent for any serious trouble.

The day of the meet was at hand. The athletic teams of the five high schools—three of Centerport and one each from Lumberport and Keyport—were to meet on the Central High field. There were several important trophies, as well as the usual league pins for the winners, and interest in the field day—not alone among the girls themselves—ran high.

Laura Belding and her mates had figured out very carefully just what events Central High was sure to win, and how many of the “uncertain” points were needed to clinch the championship.

They felt sure of the hundred-yard dash; as far as they could learn no girl in any of the five schools had developed the speed of Bobby Hargrew over that short course.

The two hundred and twenty-yard dash and the quarter-mile run were doubtful, despite Bobby’s splendid showing in the latter. The hurdle races were doubtful, too, as well as the shuttle and potato relays.

In the high and broad jumps, as well as the shot-putting, there was serious doubt. The best

Laura could figure, Central High would go into the contest needing four points more than they were *sure* of winning.

Those four points might be supplied by Bobby in the quarter-mile run, one of the chief events of the day, and Eve Sitz in the broad jump and putting the shot.

"You girls have got to do your very best—don't forget that!" Laura told them, as they separated the night before the meet. "Central High just about leans her whole weight on you."

It was on Friday and the whole school was excused at noon; but those taking part in the events of the day were not obliged to report until one o'clock—and then only to the committee at the gymnasium building.

The crowds from Lumberport and from Keyport came in chartered steamers. They marched into the field just before one o'clock, and the classes from the East and West Highs followed them a few minutes later. The girls in their light dresses, and with the flags fluttering, were a pretty sight.

Of course, the grandstand was rapidly filling with adult spectators, and with the boys, when the girls of Central High came in. There was some marching and counter-marching, before all were seated. Already some of the girls, in their

gymnasium clothes, began to appear on the courts for warming-up practice.

Suddenly Bobby Hargrew burst into a knot of Central High girls gathered around Mrs. Case, on the main floor of the gym. building, and fairly shouted:

"Where is she?"

"Where's who?" asked Laura, curiously. "Is this one of your jokes? Who are you looking for?"

"Where's Eve? Who's seen Eve Sitz?" repeated Bobby, anxiously.

"Why, I think you'll find her around somewhere. What's the matter? Got to see her right this moment, Bobby?"

Bobby's tone of tragic despair stopped the joking at last, however, as she cried:

"She's not reported. She isn't here. Nobody's seen her. She hasn't come into town, as far as I can find out. And certain sure she hasn't come into this building—and it's one o'clock now!"

"Why, Clara! what do you mean?" asked the physical instructor of Central High. "It is not possible that Evangeline Sitz would fail to appear at such a time as this?"

"And with so much depending on her?" shrieked Jess Morse. "Impossible!"

"Something has happened to her," said Laura, aghast.

"Has nobody seen her?" demanded Mrs. Case.

Nobody had.

"I'll run to father's office and telephone," suggested Nellie Agnew. "They have a telephone at the Sitz farm, haven't they?"

"Of course," rejoined Laura. "Do run, Nell!"

The group, mostly made up of juniors, was horror-stricken by the fact that one of the most dependable of the girls was missing. But a senior who stood near said, scoffingly:

"Oh, I guess that girl won't be missed. We've got Lou Potter to put right in her place—in both the shot-put and the broad jump. And the chance belonged to Lou, anyway. Now she'll get her rights, perhaps."

CHAPTER XXIV

MARGIT PAYS A DEBT

"DID you hear what that girl said, Laura?" demanded Bobby, in a whisper, clinging to the arm of Mother Wit. "It sounded as though she knew something about Eve's absence."

"No. Just jealousy," returned Laura.

"I—don't—know—— Here's Nell!" exclaimed the smaller girl, eagerly.

The doctor's daughter ran up, very much excited.

"Otto was on the 'phone," she said. "He says that Eve left for town in time to catch the nine-twenty-seven. Why, she should have been here two hours ago!"

"What do you suppose has happened?" wailed Jess.

"I will see the committee at once," said Mrs. Case, quietly. "Of course, if Evangeline does not report in time, we shall have to put in a substitute."

"Oh, Mrs. Case!" cried Bobby. "*Don't* put in that Lou Potter!"

"What, Clara? Is that your loyalty to Central High?" demanded the athletic instructor, sternly.

"Well, she's been so mean——"

"But if she is the next best girl we have in training, and Eve does not appear, would you cripple Central High's chances for a petty feud like this?"

Mrs. Case spoke warmly and Bobby fell back abashed. But all the juniors were amazed and troubled by the emergency which had so suddenly arisen.

The attitude of some seniors surprised Eve's friends, too. They were seen to gather in groups, and giggle and whisper, and when the troubled juniors passed these seniors made remarks which suggested that they knew more about Eve's absence than her own friends.

Especially was Lou Potter in high feather over something. She sneered at Laura Belding, when the latter went about asking everybody if they had seen or heard of Eve that morning.

Time approached for the early events of the afternoon, and the relay teams were called out for the first event. About that time Margit Salgo, who had been moving about in the crowd of Central High competitors, suddenly broke away from a group, of whom Lou Potter was

the center, and ran hurriedly for the exit.

At the gate the ticket-taker had just allowed Mr. and Mrs. Belding to enter and Margit saw Chet—whom she now knew very well—beside their automobile outside.

“Chetwood!” she gasped, running out to him. “There has something happened that will make Central High lose to-day—it is a plot—it is a meanness——”

She broke into German, as she did when she was excited, and Chet literally “threw up his hands.”

“Hold your horses, Miss Margaret,” he begged. “I can’t follow you when you talk like that. My German’s lame in both feet, anyway—like the son of Jonathan.”

“I do not know your Jonathan,” she cried, when Chet, grinning, interrupted:

“You’re weak in your Scripture, then. But what about it? What’s happened?”

“They have got Eve Sitz!” declared Margit, tragically.

“Who’s got her?”

“I do not know for sure. I only suspect,” declared the girl. “But quick! drive where I shall say. We may be in time.”

“Do you mean to say that Eve hasn’t got here yet?”

"I do."

"Yet she's already left home?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

"And she's an important figure in to-day's events, I understand," quoth Master Chet.

"You think you know where she is?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Margit.

"Hop in, then. Tell me where to go, and we'll get there if a policeman doesn't hold us up on the way."

Margit whispered in his ear. Chet looked surprised; then nodded and helped her into the seat beside him. In a minute they were out of the crowd of other autos and were speeding down Whiffle Street and into Market.

When they struck the main thoroughfare the young fellow had to drive the car more circumspectly; but he made such time that more than one traffic officer held up a warning hand and shook his head at them.

"Sure you know where you want to go, Margaret?" Chet asked his companion once, as they dodged around a truck and turned off into a long and narrow side street where the class of tenements on either hand were of the cheaper quality.

"Yes," nodded the girl. "I should know. I was there myself."

"Oh! that's where the Gyps. have their encampment in town?" exclaimed Chet.

"Yes."

"And you think Eve has been caught by the same people who held you?"

"Yes. I believe so."

"Then take it from me, Margaret," declared Chet, decidedly, "a policeman goes into the house with us. I don't take any chances with those people."

She nodded again and a few moments later she told him to stop before a certain number. This was, indeed, a crowded and mean section of the town.

"I thought Romany folk lived in the open air and were bold and free—and all that?" said Chet, in disgust, as he stopped the engine and prepared to get out after removing certain plugs so that the car could not be started during their absence.

"In town they live like other poor people. They camp in a cheap flat. But they would not remain here long if they did not hope to get hold of me," replied Margit, quietly.

"Hullo! You're running right into trouble, perhaps," said Chet, doubtfully.

"What if I am? That girl, Eve, was good to me. And those other girls are my friends.

We will get her free so that she may get to the athletic field in time. What?"

"I guess it is what," admitted Chet, to himself.

Then he saw an officer and beckoned to the man. A few words explained their need.

"Ha! I was told to keep an eye on those folk. I know 'em," said the policeman. "And this is the girl who was with them before?" and he stared curiously at Margit Salgo.

They went quickly into the house and up to the floor that the girl remembered very well indeed. She pointed out the door of the flat and Chet rapped upon it. The officer kept in the shadow.

The door opened a trifle, after the second knock, and a voice whispered some word which Chet could not understand. Instantly Margit hissed a reply—it was in Romany.

The door opened a bit wider. Somebody inside saw the girl; but Chet was seen, too.

"What did Ah tell 'ee?" demanded Jim Varey's gruff voice. "This is a business tae bring trouble tae us, says I—and I was right."

Before he had ceased speaking the policeman sprang forward and with knee and shoulder forced the door wide open. He had drawn his club.

"Keep still—all you here! If you give me trouble I'll arrest all of you instead of this man and his wife," and he seized Jim by the shoulder.

"Where's the girl?" cried Chet. "Eve! Eve Sitz! Are you here?"

There was an answering cry from back in some other room. Margit darted past the struggling people in the kitchen and opened a door beyond.

"Here I am!" cried Eve Sitz.

The country girl was tied to a chair, but not tightly enough to cramp her limbs. Nor had she been really ill-treated.

"Run down," said the officer to Chet, "and blow this whistle. Tell my partner, when he comes, to send for the wagon. We'll give these folks a ride."

"Oh, but I must get to the field, Chetwood!" cried Eve, in despair. "They told me Margit was here and needed me, and I came right from the train. I don't know what it means——"

Chet had darted down the stairs and he soon came back with the other policeman. The officers agreed that the boy and two girls need not accompany them to the station; the Gypsy Queen and her husband, with the other Romany folk at home in the flat, could be held until later in the day for somebody to appear against them.

And that somebody was Miss Carrington's lawyer, Aaron MacCullough. Eve had no more trouble with the Gypsies—nor did Margit. Mr. MacCullough took the opportunity of showing the roaming folk that they could make little out of Margit or her friends, and then the Centerport police warned them out of town.

Meanwhile Chet, with the two girls, got into the automobile, and started back toward the Central High athletic field. It was already two o'clock, and on the program of the day the event of the broad jump would be called in less than half an hour!

CHAPTER XXV

THE WINNING POINTS

THAT first relay race, in which the Junior Four of Central High took part, passed like a nightmare for Laura Belding and her companions. Every one of them was worried about Eve's disappearance—so worried that they came perilously near not doing their very best.

But the rooters for their school got off with a splendid chorus when the girls came on the field, and with all that enthusiasm Laura and her comrades could not fail "to pull off some brilliant running," as Bobby slangily expressed it.

And they did so. The four won the point for Central High, and next in line was the one hundred-yard dash. Bobby, as fresh as a lark, came to the scratch and prepared to do her very best against the representatives from the four other high schools. There was a girl from Lumberport whom she had been told to look out for. But Bobby proposed to "look out" for

nobody on this short dash. The girl who got off in the best form was almost sure to win.

And that girl was Bobby. At the word she shot away like an arrow, and a roar of approval burst from the seats occupied by the boys of Central High.

"C—e—n, Central High!
 C—e—n—t—r—a—l, Central High!
 C—e—n—t—r—a—l—h—i—g—h, Central
 High!
 Ziz—z—z—z—
 Boom!"

Bobby seemed to be fairly borne along on that yell. She started ahead and she kept ahead. Like a flash she went down the track and breasted the tape quicker than it takes to tell it.

"Bobby Hargrew! She's all right!" sang the girls of Central High on the benches.

Then girls and boys joined in, and finally the other schools added their cheers to the pæan of praise that sent Bobby back to the gym. building with a delightful glow at her heart.

"Good for you, Bobs!" cried Jess, who stood in the sun in her blanket coat. "That's another of the points we need. Why, we're going to wipe up the field with them."

"But where's Eve?" panted Bobby. "Has anybody seen her?"

"No. She didn't come. She's left us in the lurch——"

"Not intentionally, I am sure," declared Bobby, quickly.

"Well, Mrs. Case is going to put Lou in for the broad jump if Eve doesn't show up. And that miserable senior is as perky about it as she can be. There she is yonder, all ready for the event, although it's not due for an hour yet," added Jess.

The field was next cleared for folk dancing, taking part in which were most of the freshman and sophomore classes of all five schools. This attracted the adult spectators more than it did the girls themselves; the latter's keenest interest was centered in the all-absorbing athletic events.

One of the juniors kept watch at the entrance to the field, and sent in word now and then that nothing had been heard or seen of Eve Sitz. Laura and her other friends did not know that Margit had gone away with Chet Belding to hunt for the missing girl.

"If she doesn't come pretty soon all will be lost!" groaned Nellie Agnew, as the field cleared after the folk dancing.

"Maybe Lou can carry the points for us," suggested Dora Lockwood, doubtfully.

"Never in this world!" cried Bobby.

"Nor does Mrs. Case believe it. But it's the best she can do," said Jess. "There! after this event comes the broad jump."

"See that nasty Lou Potter!" complained Bobby. "She's standing there, grinning just like a Chessy-cat——"

"Hold on, Bobby, hold on!" exclaimed Nellie Agnew, admonishingly. "Remember!"

"Remember what?" snapped Bobby.

"'Loyalty to Central High!' That's the battle cry."

"And right Nell is, Bobs," interposed Jess. "We've got to give that girl the finest kind of a send-off when she goes into the field. Hearten her up! Never mind how mean we think her, remember she represents Central High, and the old school needs the points."

"Quite true, girls," said Laura. "When Lou goes out to jump, pass the word to the boys to give her an ovation."

And just then there was some shouting at the gate, the crowd opened, and a figure dashed through wildly and made for the gym.

"It's Eve! It's Eve!" shouted Bobby, fairly dancing up and down.

Margit Salgo was right behind the country

girl. She hurried with her to the dressing rooms, and before the broad jump was called, Eve appeared, cool, smiling, and quite like her usual self.

"Mrs. Case! I protest!" declared Lou Potter, standing before the physical instructor of Central High, as Eve approached. "This is my chance. I demand the right to make this jump."

But the instructor only smiled and shook her head.

"Evangeline is in plenty of time," she said. "You are merely a substitute, Miss Potter. Are you ready, Eve? Then, take your place with the other contestants. You are Number 3."

News of Eve's nick o' time appearance had been circulated by Chet Belding when he joined the Central High boys. When it came the girl's turn to jump she received an ovation that startled the echoes.

And Eve did not disappoint her friends. She carried off the honors of the broad jump by two inches over every other competitor, beating the record established two years before.

Bobby did equally as well in the quarter-mile race. That was a trial of greater endurance than her winning dash, but she came along ahead of all the other sprinters, and won by a clean two yards.

Then Eve went into the field again and beat

the famous Magdeline Spink, of Lumberport, putting the shot, by ten and a quarter inches—making a remarkable score for Central High, and establishing a record for following classes to attempt to beat for some years to come.

Of course, the girls as a whole did not know for sure that any of the seniors had had anything to do with Eve's being abducted to the Varey flat; but because Lou Potter, and others, had been so positive that Eve would not appear, the juniors could not help feeling suspicious.

Had it not been for Laura Belding, ever the peace-maker, friction might have resulted that would have lasted through the remainder of the term and spoiled the graduation exercises for Central High that year.

"We can afford to let the matter rest as it is," said Mother Wit, to her junior class friends. "Central High won—we got the winning points—and we stand at the head of our school athletic league. We can be satisfied with our score.

"As far as these seniors go—— Well, the bad ones are not the entire class. And, anyway, they will soon be graduated and we shall have no more trouble from them. Let them be an example to us——"

"An example!" cried the irrepressible Bobby. "I guess you mean a horrible example."

"Perhaps. 'At least, let us remember, when

we are seniors, not to do as they have done," concluded Mother Wit.

"If I'm any prophet," said Jess. "We won't be like them."

"Well, you are no prophet!" cried Bobby. "And don't talk to me any more about prophets and fortune-tellers."

"Oh-ho!" mocked Nellie. "Bobby no longer believes in the Gypsy Queen!"

"I believe in nothing of the kind. I was a dreadfully foolish girl to pay any attention to that wicked woman. You see, she was wrong. I got into no trouble this term with Gee Gee, after all."

But Bobby said nothing to her friends about the greater fear that she had had for weeks—the fear that her father might bring home a new wife. She knew now that that had been merely a spiteful guess of the Gypsy Queen, who knew Mr. Hargrew's circumstances, and thought it safe to warn his daughter that he might marry again.

"The wicked old witch—that's what she is!" thought Bobby. "Father Tom would never do that. I am going to be his housekeeper as well as his partner." And nothing in the future could ever make Bobby Hargrew doubt her father's word.

The girls of Central High—especially the

juniors—carried off greater honors after that Field Day; but never did they win trophies that gave them more satisfaction than these.

Eve was sure to make a name for herself in the league in the future; and Bobby had developed into quite a sprinter. Laura Belding looked forward in the next year to developing other girls into all-round athletes who would win points for Central High.

And indeed, they all—girls and instructors alike—looked forward to immense benefit as well as pleasure to be derived from the future athletic activities of the Girls of Central High.

THE END

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